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**CONCEPTIONS OF MIXED RACE AND THE POLITICS OF
TEMPORALITY**

A Dissertation in

Philosophy and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

by

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I critique more celebratory approaches to the politics of mixed race over the past thirty years in the U.S. I am critical of what I call the “Great Multiracial Hope,” or the figuring of mixed race/multiraciality as harbinger of a racially just and liberatory future. In concluding that a liberatory future is not far off given statistical increases of interracial coupling and mixed race persons, the Great Multiracial Hope is problematic to the extent that it substitutes an easy (and in many respects ‘given’) picture of a harmonious future for the difficult work of racial justice. This future is by no means given and discussions that figure the spectacle of mixed race and interraciality as itself or on some level redemptive are at best, a distraction, and at worst, a way of reconsolidating oppressive logics. Therefore, this project employs theorization on race, nation, sexuality, and queerness to offer a critical reassessment of U.S. racial history, the racial nation state, mixed race identity and identification, the intersections of race and sexuality, and notions of temporality operating in liberatory politics.

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Introduction
Toward a Political Ontology of (Mixed) Race

It is now commonplace to hear about the trends regarding the U.S.'s changing racial demographics. Interracial marriages are on the rise, current rates of immigration are high, and the numbers of multiracial people are steadily increasing. We are undergoing what philosopher Ronald Sundstrom refers to as the "browning of America," or the rapid increase in Latino, Asian American, and mixed-race populations.¹ Non-white babies are now the majority of babies born in the U.S. And by 2042, it is predicted, white Americans will make up less than 50% of the population, making no one racial group a population that holds the majority.² The U.S. will be, as many have described, a 'minority-majority' nation. As Ilana from the Comedy Central show *Broad City* remarks, "Statistically, we're headed toward an age where everybody's gonna be, like, caramel and queer."³

Anxieties about this change are high. From the right, we hear white congressman Steve King stating "we can't restore our civilization with somebody else's babies"⁴ while Speaker Paul Ryan was recently quoted saying "Americans need to have more babies"⁵ in order to maintain the workforce. We can guess how the 'we' in King's statement and 'Americans' in Ryan's are implicitly racially coded here, especially given, in the case of the latter, the existence of a work

¹ Ronald R. Sundstrom. (2008). *The Browning of America and the Evasion of Social Justice*. State University of New York Press: New York, NY.

² Sam Roberts. (2008). "Minorities in U.S. Set to Become Majority by 2042." *New York Times*. From <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/14/world/americas/14iht-census.1.15284537.html>

³ "The Lockout." *Broad City*. Comedy Central. Written by Abbi Jacobson and Ilana Glazer, directed by Lucia Aniello, 2014.

⁴ Theodore Schleifer. (2017). "King Doubles Down on Controversial 'Babies' Tweet." *CNN* from <https://www.cnn.com/2017/03/13/politics/steve-king-babies-tweet-cnntv/index.html>

⁵ Scott Wong. (2017) "Ryan: Americans Need to Have More Babies." *The Hill*. From <http://thehill.com/homenews/house/364920-ryan-americans-need-to-have-more-babies>

force of immigrants ready to accept jobs others (read: white people) will not.⁶ Yet, there is, what I think is the winning sentiment, that of Ilana as she happily comments on the future, that articulates this demographic change as a necessarily good or even great thing. While this sentiment may be tenuous in the sense that it is about a projected future that is not yet here, there is nevertheless what I identify as a swelling of hope concerning an increasingly ‘mixed’ or ‘blended’ nation. Consider for example that in 2013 *National Geographic* chose to center its 125th anniversary issue on what is projected to be the beautiful, blended look of the “average American” in the coming years.⁷ The article offers a spread of headshots from individuals, young and old, who are all supposed to embody, as the title suggests, the “Changing face of America.” It showcases Americans with a medium beige skin tone, light eyes, loose curls, etc.—phenotypical characteristics that one might associate with ‘racial ambiguity.’ It begins with a header that reads, “we’ve become a country where race is no longer black or white” and continues on to pose the question: “what is it about the faces on these pages that we find so intriguing?”⁸ The article chronicles the changing demographics captured by the census and first person experiences of ‘mixed race,’ primarily discussing self-identification of its participants. While the article does note continuing disparities in regards to race, it remains hopeful that changing demographics will force a shift in processes of racialization: “If we can’t slot people into familiar categories,” the author suggests, “perhaps we’ll be forced to reconsider existing definitions of race and identity, presumptions about who is us and who is them.”⁹ A *News.Mic* article commenting on National Geographic’s determinations speaks highly of the possibilities for a future America, stating: “It’s no secret that interracial relationships

⁶ Natalie Kitroeff and Geoffrey Mohan. (2017). “Wages Rise on California Farms. Americans Still Don’t Want the Job.” *LA Times*. From <http://www.latimes.com/projects/la-fi-farms-immigration/>;

⁷ Lise Funderburg. (2013). “The Changing Face of America.” *National Geographic*. From <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2013/10/changing-face-america/>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

are trending upward, and in a matter of years we'll have Tindered, OKCupid-ed and otherwise sexed ourselves into one giant amalgamated mega-race,” concluding that this is an “encouraging symbol of a rapidly changing America.”¹⁰

Whether one sees this new racial dawning as a good or bad thing, both assume that the shifts it might entail will have large-scale repercussions in terms of patterns of racial belonging and relations between races. So why is this? At base this is an anxiety about changing status and power dynamics. Indeed, this is the stuff of racial dynamics. There is of course the apparent sense on behalf of whites that this will result in a loss of power given their decreasing numbers. There is also an abundant hope that changing demographics will address or even solve our nation’s racial ills by making racial distinctions irrelevant. Neither the threat nor hope experienced from these projected demographics is so straightforward.

A ‘mixed’ or ‘blended’ future, brought forth through changing racial demographics is seen *as itself* either cause for celebration or fearful anxiety. That is, the fact of a ‘minority-majority’ nation in 2042 is thought to be *either* the ‘cure’ for the racial ills of our past (e.g. the ills of racial slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and xenophobic prejudice will be redeemed) or evidence of a certain national ailment (e.g. the foundations of ‘American society’—white/Anglo/ protestant belonging—is crumbling and needs to be retained). Comedian Hari Kondabolu draws out the illogic of this intense concentration on ‘2042’ as itself a signifier of certain sociocultural and political changes to come. Poking fun largely at the fact that, as he says, “a lot of white people are freaked out about 2042” (in the sense that they are worried about losing social and material power

¹⁰ Zak Cheney Rice. (2014). “National Geographic Determined What Americans Will Look Like in 2050, and It’s Beautiful.”. *Mic*. From <https://mic.com/articles/87359/national-geographic-determined-what-americans-will-look-like-in-2050-and-it-s-beautiful#.FBRNZ07jo>

given their impending ‘minority’ status), Kondabolu speaks in his album “Waiting for 2042” the following:

Here's the bigger point, here's the bigger point, right: 49 percent white doesn't make you the minority. That's not how math works, right? Forty-nine percent white is only the minority if you think the other 51 percent is exactly the same, right. It only works if you think, well, it's 49 percent white people and 51 percent you people. That's the only way that works.¹¹

This fear and anxiety from more conservative factions is a symptom of a certain homogenization of ‘non-white’ in the first place. On the flip side, we can also see how superficial approaches to ‘2042’ of a more progressive variety similarly need to homogenize minorities in ways that center whiteness in order to claim that 51% will merit a *necessary* power shift. The point here is that neither the threat nor promise of a blended American future (‘2042’) somehow directly follows from these changing demographics. U.S. racial history and practices of racialization are far more dynamic than these orientations to the future allow. We don’t know what the future will hold, but in an oppressive contemporary social world, the aim in the present must be to continually confront oppressions to the fullest extent. Therefore, it is the *ideologies apparent in the projections of 2042’s meaning* that are the pressing social, political, and ethical philosophical concerns I take up in this project.

The focus of my project involves a critical analysis of the belief in the redemptive potentials of mixed race/multiraciality that have been developed by scholars and activists over the last 30 or so years. In the late 1980s in the U.S. a movement began that advocated for the public recognition of mixed race identity and multiracial families. Activists groups such as Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally), AMEA (Association of MultiEthnic Americans) and APFU (A Place For Us), while engaging in divergent tactics, all shared the belief that it was inaccurate and problematic

¹¹ Terry Gross. (2014). “For Comic Hari Kondabolu, Explaining the Joke IS The Joke.” *NPR*. From <https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=305509473>

for multiracial Americans to be ‘forced’ to choose a single, ‘monoracial’ racial identification. Widespread attention was paid to classification on government forms such as school, employment, census, and medical forms, since, at this time, there was no option available for describing one’s multiracial heritage. Individuals could choose a ‘traditional’ racial category, like black or white, but not both, or, in some cases one could choose to mark ‘other.’ This was unacceptable to activists who spoke of the harm this levied on individuals as they navigated terms of racial belonging. The concern was that those who fell between the gaps of traditional racial categories suffered psychosocially since they did not have the language to articulate their experiences as multiracial or mixed. As Linda Alcoff writes,

One’s ability to be accepted in various kinds of social circles, religious groups, and neighborhoods is tied to one’s (apparent) race. And I would also argue that not only social status is affected here, but one’s lived interiority as well. Such things as government benefits and employment opportunities can have an effect on one’s subjectivity, one’s sense of oneself as a unique, individuated person, and as a competent, acceptable, or inferior. In other words, without a coherent identity, an individual can feel an absence of agency. Dominant discourses, whether they are publicly regulated and institutionalized or more amorphous and decentralized, can affect the lived experience of subjectivity. Discourses and institutions implicitly invoke selves that have specific racial identities, which are correlated to those selves’ specific legal status, discursive authority, epistemic credibility, and social standing.¹²

As Alcoff’s work suggests, identity and identification is meaningful in a society such as ours “where the integration of self is taken to be necessary for mental health”¹³ and so, the lack of opportunities for integration can be detrimental. Indeed, historically (and in many ways, continuing today), the site of mixed race/multiraciality has been depicted as one of ‘lack,’ ‘degeneracy,’ and ‘pathology.’ As Alcoff writes,

Mixed race people are treated as the corporeal instantiation of a lack—the lack of an identity that can provide a public status. They (we) are turned away from as if from an

¹² Linda Martín Alcoff. (2006). *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*. Oxford University Press: New York, NY, 269.

¹³ *Ibid*, 268

unpleasant sight, the sight and mark of an unclean copulation, the product of taboo, the sign of racial impurity, cultural dilution, colonial aggression, or even emasculation.¹⁴

Late 1980s and 1990s activism in the U.S. thus emerged from this historical situation and set “multiracial theory” on a path that was “founded on the principle of recognition,” arguing that “a lack of recognition is a form of oppression.”¹⁵ This has of course been complicated over the years, with the development of a variety of scholarship exploring political, existential, and metaphysical questions related to mixed race/multiraciality, but suffice it to say that the field itself largely depends on the fact that acknowledging mixed race/multiraciality is important and necessary.

We can understand the broad, historical strokes of multiracial discourse through Jayne Ifekwunigwe’s description of three identifiable ‘ages’ wherein discourses underwent significant transformation. These are the Age of Pathology, Age of Celebration, and Age of Critique.¹⁶ In her anthology *‘Mixed Race’ Studies: A Reader*, she describes the Age of Pathology occurring in the 19th century and first part of the 20th century. This is the period that accepted homogeneity of racial classifications, thus making the position of ‘mixedness’ untenable, pathologized, and one of secrecy. We can think here of the literary trope of ‘passing’ that was salient in the works of authors such as Nella Larsen, William Faulkner, and James Weldon Johnson at the time. This literature used the figure of the ‘tragic mulatto’ character who is assumed to suffer because of their inability to fit into a racial community. The tragic mulatto is figured as the victim of rigid racial groupings who often suffered a ‘tragic’ fate. Consider the character of Clare in Larsen’s *Passing* who either jumps or is pushed out of a window to her death when it is discovered that she is ‘passing as white.’ The Age of Celebration radically confronts this assumption of mixedness as problematic,

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Molly Littlewood McKibbin. (2014). “The Current State of Multiracial Discourse.” *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies*. 1.1, 190.

¹⁶ Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe. (2004). “Introduction: Rethinking ‘Mixed Race’ Studies.” In *‘Mixed Race’ Studies: A Reader*. Edited by Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe. Routledge: New York, NY.

pathological, shameful, and something to keep secret. Occurring in the late 20th century and coinciding with the political movement of multiracial recognition referenced above, scholarship from this period tended to focus on an articulation of a valorized mixed race subject position. Consider psychologist Maria P. Root's "Bill of Rights for People of Mixed Heritage" where we find proclamations that that mixed person has the right to "not to keep the races separate in [them]" and "identify [oneself] differently in different situations" and "create a vocabulary to communicate about being multiracial or multiethnic."¹⁷ As Root claims,

In essence, to name oneself is to validate one's existence and declare visibility. This seemingly simple process is a significant step in the liberation of multiracial persons from the oppressive structure of the racial classification system that has relegated them to the land of the 'in between'¹⁸

At base here is the assumption that to be 'in between' is a position that one is forced into given a rigid racial classification and so, the goal, according to Root and others operating within this age, ought to be to take hold of processes of racial naming and develop a positive and substantial mixed race identity. This period also saw the work of philosopher Naomi Zack, who developed the first book length meditation on mixed race in the U.S. in the field. In *Race and Mixed Race*, she develops a metaphysical, existential, and political analyses of mixed race, favoring the embrace of a stand-alone category of mixed race as the antirace, and thus in her account, the antiracist position, one that "looks to the future rather than to the past, an identity founded on freedom and resistance to oppression rather than immanence and acceptance of tradition."¹⁹

The Age of Celebration has given way to the period we currently find ourselves in, described by Ifekwunigwe as the Age of Critique. This period moves beyond what was perhaps

¹⁷ Maria P. Root. (1993). "Bill of Rights for People of Mixed Heritage." From <http://www.drmariaroot.com/doc/BillOfRights.pdf>

¹⁸ Maria P. Root. (2004). "Within, Between, Beyond Race." in *'Mixed Race' Studies Reader*. Edited by Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe. Routledge: New York, NY, 145.

¹⁹ Naomi Zack. (1993). *Race and Mixed Race*. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, PA, 163-164.

indeed radical at the time of Zack's and Root's writings: simply claiming mixed race as liberatory. Today, given the successes of the multiracial movement of the late 20th century, options for identifying as mixed race are now more common. The task at hand in the Age of Critique then is to further think through the ramifications of *how* conceptions of mixed race identity, the multiracial family, racial oppression(s) and resistance have been advanced.

Scholars in this period have posed questions about the extent to which mixed race might reinscribe traditional boundaries of race, work in conjunction with other oppressions rather than directly opposing them, promote the further biologization of race, and produce ignorances of the foundational historical violences of white supremacy and colonialism. While the Age of Celebration has surely become more tempered in recent years by the Age of Critique—there is nevertheless still strong sentiment regarding the potentials mixed race and interracial relationships hold for the future of race in the U.S. Today, these articulations are more complex and nuanced than naïve versions in the past, but we must continue to reckon with multiraciality in more critical and nuanced ways. Given demographic changes discussed above, it is becoming increasingly necessary to wrestle with the ‘fact’ of mixed or multiracial Americans and interracial relationships. As Kimberly McClain De Costa writes, “That individualized expressions of multiracial identity have proliferated in the last decade is clear—numerous memoirs and essays exploring personal experiences of being mixed have appeared, for example, and individuals can and do now choose tailor-made racial identifications on the census.”²⁰ I situate the current study within the ongoing historical movement of the Age of Critique, responding to the proliferation of discourses on mixed race identity. I seek to challenge fundamental conceptual assumptions about ‘mixed race’ particularly in regards to its deployment as salvific spectacle within liberal, progressive frames of

²⁰ Kimberly McClain Dacosta. (2007). *Making Multiracials: State, Family, and Market in the Redrawing of the Color Line*. Stanford University Press. Stanford, CA, 11.

politics and temporality. While we can distinguish general trends in research between ‘Celebration’ and ‘Critique,’ the two movements of thought remain salient today and the task at hand is to continually articulate the extent to which naïve celebration persists even within critical elements of the field. From a philosophical angle, this project seeks to further nuance the conceptual critiques of mixed race history, ‘identity,’ temporality, and politics in the U.S. Within the discipline of philosophy, save for a few examples, the Age of Critique has yet to fully get off the ground. There is a need for scholarship within the field that takes a more historicized and politicized approach to understanding mixed race in the U.S. Largely, interdisciplinary fields such as Performance Studies, American Studies, and African American Studies as well as English and Geography have taken the lead here.²¹ This dissertation follows in their lead and seeks to develop further tools for thinking ‘mixed race’ critically and creatively in the contemporary period.

In this project, I focus my analysis on the ‘promise’ side of the ‘threat v. promise’ ideological equation of the ‘browning of America.’ My critique is aimed at resituating discussions of racial mixedness today in a more robust historical frame, one that understands the depths to which processes of racial domination structured and continues to structure dominant approaches to understandings of the history of mixed race in the U.S., the concept of mixed race identity, the politicization of ‘time’ and the temporal schema upholding mixed race as somehow ‘new’ and thus ‘liberating,’ and the understanding of ‘interracial intimacies’ and the state’s role investment in managing these.

I do not spend extended time engaging with rhetoric that outwardly manifests racist anxieties about changing racial demographics, though I recognize this as a present feature of the sociopolitical milieu. I take it as a given that the anxieties associated with ‘2042’ being a ‘threat’

²¹ See Sexton (2008); Nyong’o (2009); Elam (2011); Mahtani (2014); Dunning (2009)

often take place through “dog whistle politics”²² that engage racially coded notions of ‘we’ and ‘Americans’ as seen above with Congressmen King and Ryan. These clearly manifest ongoing racial, nativist, sexual, gendered, and class-based oppressions and are deservedly critiqued as such. Instead of pursuing that project here, however, I focus on the surety of the redemptive potentials of mixed race/multiraciality within celebratory discourses in the U.S. These positions are assumed to either not participate in the reproduction of oppressions or be actively working against them. However, a main claim I advance in this project is that these celebratory discourses often (perhaps inadvertently) participate in the reproduction of various oppressions that ought to be contested. While I critique standard usages of ‘mixed race’ because of this, I do not suggest a wholesale rejection of this language. I instead propose various conceptual remodelings of the cluster of terms mixed race/multiraciality/interraciality/race mixture/miscegenation given a more thorough historical and political philosophical situating. I am particularly critical of assumptions about interracial relationships and mixed race people as ‘things in themselves,’ as assumed analytic objects. Instead of beginning my analysis with a conception of mixed race that is putative, I look at the processes and discourses by which standard notions of mixed race form. I argue that discourses that begin from the point of an uninterrogated (and by this I mean primarily ahistorical and apolitical) notion of mixed race reproduces logics of race that ultimately sustain a racist material and symbolic world. And so, I offer a *political ontology of race* as a framework that allows us to consider ‘mixed race’ in a more deeply historical and political vein. As I understand it, a political ontology of race understands race as an organizing feature of our sociopolitical order. For Jared Sexton (by way of Frank Wilderson), political ontology signals the fact that race in many regions of the world, including the U.S. was a political project emergent from a specific historical

²² Ian Haney Lopez. (2014). *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented and Wrecked the Middle Class*. Oxford University Press: New York, NY.

junction—namely the transatlantic slave trade—which developed a material and sociosymbolic schema in which a system of distortion and devaluation of racial ‘blackness’ was set in motion.²³

This feature is ontological in the sense that “the application of the law of racial slavery is pervasive, regardless of variance or permutation in its operation across the better part of the millennium.”²⁴

As Sexton writes,

Political ontology is not a metaphysical notion, because it is the explicit outcome of a politics and thereby available to historic challenge through collective struggle. But it is not simply a description of a political status either, even an oppressed political status, because it functions *as if* it were a metaphysical property across the *longue durée* of the premodern, modern, and now postmodern eras.²⁵

I will explore this in more detail towards the end of the chapter, but overall, ‘race’ is political in the sense that it is a project advancing a certain logic emergent from a specific historical junction—namely the transatlantic slave trade—and it is ontological in the sense that this logic pervades our historical social epoch, generating the functioning of race through its *appearance* as a metaphysical property, in order to uphold an ongoing project of racial domination and antiblackness.

In approaching race and mixed race through political ontology, I show how, rather than being something new and outside of U.S. racial history, or a challenge to race and racism, or a liberatory social identity, ‘mixed race’ is historically and conceptually *central* to the manifestation (and further instantiation) of racial difference through the spectacle of ‘mixedness’ demanded by ‘race’ itself. A political *ontology* of race is presented against the understanding that ‘race’ is the social or political *manipulation* of existent biological or sociocultural differences between humans, rather than the production of what is understood to count as difference in the first place. Race as

²³ Jared Sexton. (2010). “People-of-Color-Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery.” *Social Text*. 28.2.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 37.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 36-37.

political ontology establishes that racial differences “issue from direct relations of force—the scales of coercion—and is only elaborated or *institutionalized* within relations of power—the scales of consent,” as Sexton describes.²⁶ Within this frame,

[Race’s] political ontology exceeds the terms of sociological investigation and the operations of the symbolic order: it is, to try another phrasing, a ‘division of species’ (Fanon 1963) effected and maintained by the technologies of violence and sexuality that underwrite the social formation, not a discriminatory manipulation of already existing bodily marks (Guillaumin 1995).²⁷

I return to the idea of the political ontology of race throughout this study and expand on it more toward the end of this chapter.

II. The Great Multiracial Hope

My project is motivated by critique of what I call the “Great Multiracial Hope,” which refers to the idea that rising numbers of multiracial/mixed race people and interracial relationships heralds a future that is necessarily more racially harmonious, just, and liberatory. In popular culture as well as segments of academia, this celebratory sentiment persists and so I seek to address this from a philosophical angle while also pointing towards moments when less naïve versions of the hope find their way into scholarship we might deem ‘critical.’ While the more naïve ‘Age of Celebration’ has surely waned, my worry is that ‘critical’ work still maintains historical and political problems we ought to address. This is why it is helpful to revisit and make clear the criticisms of work like Naomi Zack’s while developing critical questions for the scholarship of

²⁶ Jared Sexton. (2008). *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN, 9.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 11.

those like Ronald Sundstrom who seeks to nuance any straightforwardly celebratory approach to the politics of multiracialism.

Overall, the ‘Great Multiracial Hope’ invokes concerns about (racial) identity, politics, and temporality and poses a version of a ‘liberatory’ future that will naturally unravel given the existence of mixed race populations and interracial partnerships. This future is endorsed as the inevitability of the progressive movement of history itself, one that will lead us to the development of a less discriminatory, more inclusive nation. Ultimately, I am critical of arguments that posit a self-evident and directly correlative nature between the existence of ‘mixed race people’ and ‘interracial relationships’ and a more liberatory future.

My understanding of the Great Multiracial Hope is purposefully impressionistic but aims to capture a certain orientation to the conceptual bundling of history, race, the future, and liberatory politics—one that articulates a necessary connection between the dissembling of traditional forms of racial classification and a more liberatory future. The Great Multiracial Hope is evidenced by an approach to history that assumes ‘mixed race’ as historically *suppressed* and thus in need of unveiling. In “Within, Between, Beyond Race?” Root asks, “Why has the United States suppressed the historical reality that a significant proportion of its citizenry has multigenerational multiracial roots?”²⁸ This is the question that drives much of the celebratory discourses on mixed race and in giving voice to the existence of mixed race in the present, scholars purport to recover and reclaim an understanding of a multiracial past. Largely, this suppression is understood via the existence of the ‘one drop rule’ or the guidelines of hypodescent (assigning race based on one’s parent’s racial group with lower status). As Paul R. Spickard writes, “The function of the one-drop rule was to solidify the barrier between Black and White, to make sure that no one who might possibly be

²⁸ Root, “Within, Between,” 145.

identified as Black also become identified as White.”²⁹ The one drop rule is understood as exhaustive of an oppressive racial history beginning with U.S. racial chattel slavery. As Spickard understands, “Calling various African people all one racial group, and associating that group with evil, sin, laziness, bestiality, sexuality, and irresponsibility, made it easier for White slave owners to rationalize holding their fellow humans in bondage, whipping them, selling them, separating their families, and working them to death.”³⁰

In the present, the Great Multiracial Hope articulates either the existence of mixed race and interracial relationships as *evidence of* racial justice and harmony (think here of ideologies of postracialism that suggest the fact that Obama was President as evidence that race no longer ‘matters’) or as a *vehicle* through which racial justice and harmony will be enacted (think here of celebrations of the fact of interracial relationships and families *as themselves* propelling racial justice and harmony). As Root triumphantly describes, mixed race today produces a historical context that is liberating in that it allows individuals to

Come of age when race is defined less by biology than by social construction.... come of age when most first-generation mixed-race persons have not been a product of rape, war, or slavery and have a visible cohort of mixed-race peers and role models in the media....and...come of age amid a cohort that has not sustained the trauma of racism to the same degree and frequency as their parents and grandparents.³¹

It is this abundantly hopeful reading of mixed race/multiraciality that is paradigmatic of what I want to describe as the Great Multiracial Hope. There can be degrees to which one might engage this hope, but overall, it provokes recognition of a liberatory present and/or future sparked by the recognition and existence of mixed race persons and interracial relationships.

²⁹ Paul R. Spickard. (2004). “The Illogic of American Racial Categories.” in *‘Mixed Race’ Studies Reader*. Edited by Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe. Routledge: New York, NY, 150.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Maria P. Root. (2003). “Five Mixed-Race Identities: From Relic to Revolution.” *New Faces in a Changing America: Multiracial Identity in the 21st Century*. Edited by Loretta Winters. Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, 4.

Functioning either as an achieved or a regulatory ideal, mixed race is advanced as itself a positive feature of our social world. Additionally, a present wherein one is able to self-identify as ‘mixed race’ is considered liberating in comparison to a racial past that disallowed this choice. If the one drop rule is taken to be the oppressive mechanism that separated and hierarchicalized races in the past, then, as the Great Multiracial Hope expresses, a present that acknowledges and celebrates mixed race and interracial relationships can work to heal the historical racial ills of the nation, and lead us to a redemptive future.

I consider the Great Multiracial Hope to be a feature of the *dominant cultural imaginary within liberal and progressive circles*—those that profess the ideals of democracy and of diversity, harmony, racial justice, etc. We can see this in the variety of children’s books, literature, blogs, and films that aim to give voice to and develop community for professed mixed race people and families by celebrating interracial relationships and the experience of being mixed. Consider the titles of children’s books that have been published within the last five years: *Mixed Blessing: A Children’s Book About a Multi-racial Family*; *Mixed Me!*; *I am Mixed*; *Mixed Me: A Tale of a Girl Who is Both Black and White*.³² Consider also a host of anthologies published within the last two decades aim to produce a sense of recognition and community for mixed race persons and families: *Raising Mixed Race: Multiracial Asian Children in a Post-Racial World*; *Mixed: Portraits of Multiracial Kids*; *I’m Chocolate, You’re Vanilla: Raising Healthy Black and Biracial Children in a Race-Conscious World*; *What Are you?: Voices of Mixed-Race Young People*.³³

³² Marsha Cosman. (2012). *Mixed Blessing: A Children’s Book About a Multi-racial Family*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform; Taye Diggs. (2015). *Mixed Me!* Macmillan; Garcelle Beauvais. (2013). *I am Mixed*. Stranger Kids; Tiffany Catledge. (2012). *Mixed Me: A Tale of a Girl Who is Both Black and White*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform;

³³ Sharon H. Chang. (2016). *Raising Mixed Race: Multiracial Asian Children in a Post-Racial World*. Routledge: New York, NY; Kip Fulbeck. (2010). *Mixed: Portraits of Multiracial Kids*. Chronicle Books LLC: San Francisco, CA; Marguerite Wright. (2000). *I’m Chocolate, You’re Vanilla: Raising Healthy Black and Biracial Children in a Race-Conscious World*. Jossey-Bass; Pearl Fuyo Gaskins. (1999). *What Are you?: Voices of Mixed-Race Young People*. Henry Holt and Company: New York, NY.

There has been, in the last few decades a concerted effort to institutionalize an embrace of mixed race as an embrace of a diverse, liberatory, and racially just future.

An ongoing debate within editorial writings over the past few years has concerned precisely the question of whether mixed race and interracial relationships will help ‘save’ the nation and solve racism? On one hand there are articles such as “How Interracial Love is Saving America” wherein law scholar Sheryll Cashin argues that “ardent integrators,” or those who pursue interracial relationships are “motivated by love and are our greatest hope for racial understanding,” and “What Biracial People Know,” wherein author Moises Velasquez-Manoff argues that multiraciality can act as a “vaccine” against the rise of the fascism of the 45th presidency of the U.S., suggesting that with growing rates of multiracial people comes growing rates of ‘immunity’ against bigotry.³⁴ Articles such as these proffer the simple fact of interracial relationships and mixed peoples as *themselves* imbued with a mythic capacity for challenging racism. On the other hand, there are articles that directly contest what I would call this superficial read of race, racism, and the future. In “Why Mixed Race Americans Will Not Save the Country,” for example, author Alexandros Orphanides directly rebuts Velasquez-Manoff, claiming that the hope of a mixed race future that will solve racism is “misleading” and “presents racism as passive—a vestigial reflex that will fade with the presence of interracial offspring, rather than as an active system that can change with time.”³⁵ Similarly, Lauren Michele Jackson in “Why a New Mixed Race Generation Will Not Solve Racism,” shows how progressive celebration of an emerging mixed race population

³⁴ Sheryll Cashin. (2017). “How Interracial Love is Saving America.” *New York Times*. From <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/03/opinion/sunday/how-interracial-love-is-saving-america.html>; Moises Velasquez-Manoff. (2017). “What Biracial People Know.” *New York Times*. From <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/04/opinion/sunday/what-biracial-people-know.html>

³⁵ Alexandros Orphanides. (2017). “Why Mixed Race Americans Will Not Save the Country.” *NPR*. From “<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/03/08/519010491/why-mixed-race-americans-will-not-save-the-country>”

often manifests in the conflation of a political with an aesthetic ideal.³⁶ Here, attention to *racism* gives way to aesthetic preference and “the hope for a future where racial ambiguity outpaces racism...seems like a future where everyone is beautiful for being ‘exotic’ (according to a white standard) yet not ‘dangerous’ (aka nonwhite).”³⁷ Both of these examples push back on a superficial representation of racism implicit in arguments depicting a necessary relationship between an emerging multiracial population and a non-racist future and show how (racialized) oppressions (such as antiblackness) are reproduced in the process.

The question of how the existence of an emerging population of mixed race individuals and interracial relations relates socially, politically, and ethically to the future of race (and to the U.S. nation, in particular) is clearly an issue on many people’s minds. Following Orphanides and Jackson, I am skeptical of such wholesale celebration of the simple fact of changing demographics because it sidesteps important struggles over power, economic redistribution, and national borders, to name a few. It allows a certain passivity that I think we should ward against. Said more straightforwardly, I find it to be a pretty faulty way of viewing the world and social change to suggest that the more sex people of different races have and the more multiracial babies that are born, will bring about a racial utopia in itself. I am critical, then, of some of the underlying ideology of this celebratory sentiment and I seek to expose, explore, and reevaluate aspects of this Great Multiracial Hope—namely, its uses of history (chapter one), enactments of identity (chapter two), temporal structure (chapter three), politics (chapter four), and the frame of the nation (chapter five). Before outlining these chapters however, I want to elaborate on how I am understanding

³⁶Lauren Michele Jackson. (2017). “Why a New Mixed Race Generation Will Not Solve Racism.” https://www.buzzfeed.com/laurmjackson/multiracial-families-cant-save-the-world-from-racism?utm_term=.hpk8QyjqAv#.vtEp0wL5eA

³⁷ Ibid.

mixed race/multiracial in this study and my goals in discussing multiraciality through the sentiment of the Great Multiracial Hope.

III. Normative Models of Mixed Race

The Great Multiracial Hope engages in the consolidation of a *certain figure* of mixed race/multiraciality and in the process poses mixed race/multiraciality *as a figure of hope*. What I mean by this is that various *normative models of mixed race* coalesce in definitions of ‘what counts’ as the ‘mixed race’ that is then upheld for its salvific potentials. I use ‘mixed race’ and ‘multiracial’ interchangeably here in an attempt to focus my attention on how these terms circulate rather than what each might definitively *mean*. My goal is to understand how, from the bottom up, social, political, and ethical interests and intentions intermesh in depictions of mixed race, antiracism, and the future. Dominant renderings of mixed race often include some variety of the following: an emphasis on parentage or grandparentage from two or more different ‘traditional’ racial backgrounds (white, black, Asian, Latino), movement away from ‘blackness’ (one is understood, for example, to be ‘Biracial *not* Black’), an assumption of ‘white *and*’ mixture, rather than mixture between people of color, a backdrop of heterosexual biological reproduction as well as a typically middle class and suburban geographic background, and the drive to articulate this emergent population in relation to the nation, as a product of its ‘exceptional’ diverse and inclusive status. I discuss these in more detail throughout the study, but for now, recount standard practiced definitions of mixed race in order to begin drawing out the normativities upheld in the process of these dominant approaches to understanding mixed race in the U.S.

Two ways of identifying mixed race/multiraciality in the U.S. stand out: parentage and phenotype (or ‘lineage’ and ‘look’). One’s different ‘monoracial’ lineage and one’s ‘ambiguous’ or ‘blended’ look contribute to the oftentimes contradictory and incoherent, yet nevertheless practiced ways of identifying mixedness. In order to understand the various ways ‘mixed race’ is measured, I’ll turn to an analysis of a 2015 Pew Research Center Study’s definition of ‘mixed’ or ‘multiracial’ and the “multiracial identity gap” it discovered in the process in order to elucidate the ways in which multiraciality is understood and practiced and the oppressions and forms of exclusion that are maintained in these definitions.³⁸

In “Multiracial in America: Proud, Diverse and Growing in Numbers,” the assumption of parentage as a key feature of identifying mixed raciality is evident. Here, the size of the U.S. multiracial population is measured by taking into account the racial background of parents and grandparents on top of self-reported race.³⁹ The operative definition of mixed race here is thus one in which having two differently raced people biologically related to you within the past two generations. In this way, heterosexual reproduction and ‘traditional’ monoracial groupings become central to the definition of mixed race.⁴⁰

³⁸ Pew Research Center. (2015). “Multiracial in America: Proud, Diverse and Growing in Numbers.” Washington, DC: June.

³⁹ It is interesting to note here that this working definition provided by the Pew Research Center conflicted with self-reports of race. That is to say, many who would be considered multiracial by the Pew Research Center, did not claim multiraciality via self-reporting.

⁴⁰ The emphasis on parentage and grandparentage foregrounds an understanding of mixed race reliant on ‘traditional,’ monoracial (read: non-mixed) racial groups. These are typically defined in the U.S. as white, black, Asian, and Latino. While in Latin America, those who are recognized as ‘Latino/as’ in the U.S. would likely be recognized as having mixed heritage, in the transmission of identity across continents, ‘Latino/a’ is represented as a homogenized category of belonging. Therefore, opposed to a system in which most of the population is recognized as more generally ‘mixed’ and not necessarily by way of identifiable monoracial parentage, mixedness has operated in contemporary U.S. society as something new and identifiable *through* monoracial parentage. Linda Alcoff captures this general idea in her analysis of ‘being mixed’ in *Visible Identities* when she advocates for an understanding of mixed race identity in the U.S. that would involve recognition of one’s lineage, creating a ‘combinatory identity.’ Discourses on mixed race in the U.S. thus seem to be intimately tied to discourses the ‘new-ness’ of mixed race today springing from relatively recent monoracial parentage (or grand-parentage).

In a sense, it is no surprise that biological reproductive heterosexuality is assumed given the frequency with which discussions of an increasing multiracial population go hand in hand with an increase in interracial relationships, since the latter (in its implicit heterosexual, biological reproductivity) is supposed to spur the former. It is in this way that normative heterosexuality undergirds claims to mixed race. And it is the extensions of normative heterosexuality (beyond and buttressing biological reproduction)—such as a certain middle to upper class suburban lifestyle—that further conditions normative model of mixed race. I explore this particularly in later chapters.

Beyond parentage or lineage, definitions of mixedness often regard the visual as a legitimizing register. The Pew Research Center study illustrates this point in its articulation of a “multiracial identity gap.” As it describes, “only four-in-ten adults with a mixed racial background (39%) say they consider themselves to be ‘mixed race or multiracial.’”⁴¹ Therefore, it appears there is a large gap in the way in which mixed race is thought about and calculated as a category and how it is experienced and lived, given the dissonance of 61% of the ‘mixed race’ population. Nearly half of respondents of ‘mixed racial background’ who did not consider themselves multiracial claimed that they did not identify as multiracial “because they look like one race.”⁴² Clearly, there are assumptions about what mixed race *looks like* operating here, and so this is the second main way in which dominant forms of ‘capturing’ mixed race take place.

‘Authentic’ mixed race is usually about the display of a ‘mixed phenotype’ or a certain intermediate look *between* white and black, or light and dark. This manifests in the assumption that a ‘medium’ shade skin tone—‘beige,’ ‘caramel,’ ‘brown,’ ‘olive,’ etc.—signifies racial mixedness, along with having features that are a blend of ‘traditional’ races (so perhaps a thin nose

⁴¹ *Pew Research Center*, 41.

⁴² *Ibid.*

and full lips or soft, curly hair). This form of defining mixed race often takes place at the level of negotiations of everyday encounters and lived realities, often producing a disconnect between it and the ‘parentage’ requirement. This can be seen in the fact that though many individuals might have mixed lineage (such as most people defined as African Americans), they are not recognized as mixed given the visual component that so often define normative models of mixed race. Although many black people are ‘mixed’ in the sense previously referenced—in terms of their lineage—they are not considered ‘mixed,’ so we see here a construction of the contemporary ‘mixed race look’ that is quite narrow and implicitly assumes nonblackness or at least a colorism in which lighter mixes are prized as the ‘authentic’ look of mixedness. It isn’t hard to understand, then, why many scholars have identified antiblackness at work within discourses of mixed race/multiraciality in the U.S.⁴³

There is a corresponding centering of whiteness in discussions of mixed race, more generally. While the Pew Research Center study does make space for recognizing mixture between racial categories ‘of color’ such as Latino and African American, questions of how *whiteness* is disrupted often frame interest in ‘mixed race,’ thereby implicitly assuming whiteness in relation to nonwhiteness. We can think here historically of the fact that anti-miscegenation law was aimed at preserving the supposed purity of whiteness rather than the ‘purity’ of racial groupings wholesale. As Peggy Pascoe describes, “miscegenation laws...prohibited Whites from marrying other groups, like ‘Negroes,’ ‘Mongolians,’ or ‘Malays,’ without prohibiting ‘Negroes,’ ‘Mongolians,’ or ‘Malays,’ from marrying each other.”⁴⁴ Presently, we see a continued assumption

⁴³ Sexton (2008).

⁴⁴ Peggy Pascoe. (2010). *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*. Oxford University Press: New York, NY, 120. Additionally, dominant discourses on passing within multiracialism studies past and present also contribute to a centering of whiteness in their implicit assumption that one typically ‘passes’ as white, given the many social and material benefits to be afforded ‘successful’ passers in a power structure of white supremacy.

or centering of whiteness in dominant discourses of multiraciality. As one mixed race writer and organizer, Lisa Hoffman-Kuroda notes,

I realized that many of the conversations I was hearing about mixed race identity were implicitly about our relationship to whiteness—our anxieties about “passing” or “not passing” as white, how to navigate light-skinned privilege, how to navigate our relationships with white family members—and that these conversations implicitly left out mixed race folks who did not have a direct relationship to whiteness at all.⁴⁵

The centering of whiteness in mainstream discourses surrounding mixed race is a product of and contributes to this second main way in which mixed race/multiraciality is identified.

Preoccupation with the ‘look’ of mixed race is perhaps exemplified in the *National Geographic* 125th anniversary feature story entitled “The Changing Face of America” where a spread of close-up pictures of individuals’ faces tells the story of the changing features of race in America [the U.S.]. The figure of the mixed race person represented here is depicted as ‘beautiful,’ to be desired, and a representation of the U.S.’s present and impending diversity and racial inclusivity. This is a matter of a certain valorization of mixedness that involves the certain (anglo) beauty norms. As mentioned, phenotypically, mixedness is distinguished from a ‘darker’ blackness through the combination of ‘darker’ and ‘lighter’ features. In this distinction, normative mixedness does not challenge a society that devalues blackness but rather reasserts the hegemony of beauty norms that emphasize lightness and thinner features *through* the figure of the (authentically) mixed person. We can think here of Lennard Davis’s claim that ‘diversity’ is the new ‘normalcy,’ which is evidenced perhaps most clearly in the neoliberal marketing of an ‘ambiguous look’ (mostly in

⁴⁵ Lisa Hoffman-Kuroda. (2018). “Decentering Whiteness: On Facing the Class Privilege that Exists in Mixed Race Asian Communities and Beyond. *The Body is Not an Apology*. From <https://thebodyisnotanapology.com/magazine/decentering-whiteness-on-facing-the-class-privilege-that-exists-in-mixed-race-asian-communities-beyond/>

terms of skin color, hair texture, etc.) that nevertheless reasserts standard beauty norms (tallness, thinness, lightness, etc.) in the process.⁴⁶

This ‘beauty’ of the individual easily slides into representing the ‘beauty’ and ‘harmony’ of the nation, as we see in the title of the *National Geographic* piece. The focus is on *America* and *its* changing face, represented through the ‘blended’ faces of ‘mixed’ individuals. The spectacle of an ‘American race’ takes hold in these representations, manifesting in ideologies of the nation, I suggest, that contribute covertly to anti-immigrant and anti-foreigner sentiment. One way we might understand this occurring is through the distinction between ‘mixed race’ and ‘Latino’ (understood as a non-mixed, ‘monoracial’ category) such that ‘Latino’ itself is barred from being a category of mixedness.

The racial definitions operative in the Pew Research Center study reveals this assumption about ‘Latino’s’ disarticulation from ‘mixed.’ In the study and in general, Latino/a is understood as a ‘monorace’ in its consolidation as a particularly U.S. racial formation. That is, as opposed to a recognition of mixedness as fundamental to racial identities in Latin America, in its transmission to the U.S., these designations coalesce in the simplified and often homogenized ‘Latino/a’ and is presented as a race that can constitute one half of a ‘mix’ but is not constitutive of mixedness itself. The Pew Research Center study’s defined multiracial group, for example, included those who indicate Hispanic or Latino heritage for themselves, their parents, or their grandparents, *but only if* they selected two or more census race categories. Said another way, Latino identity itself was not recognized as a category of mixedness; it was only when it was expressed in conjunction with another monoracially defined racial category did it participate in the definition of ‘mixed’ or ‘multiracial.’ In a present in which ‘Latino/a’ is continually charged with immigrant and ‘non-

⁴⁶ Lennard Davis. (2013). *The End of Normal: Identity in a Biocultural Era*. The University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, MI.

citizen' foreignness, we ought to be suspicious of this ordering and understand this perhaps as implicit nationalism inherent in normative models of mixed race.

I offer this cluster of dominant ideas about the 'what' of mixed race to show how standard metrics such as one's (recent) lineage and 'look' contribute to the maintenance of certain exclusionary assumptions about mixed race. These include normative heterosexuality, biological reproduction, class- and geography-based norms consistent with normative heterosexuality, Anglo beauty norms, a preoccupation with whiteness, antiblackness and colorism, and an emphasis on normative 'Americanness.' The coalescence of these norms often undergirds the dominant *figure* of mixed race that is upheld as an antidote to racism. The trope of the multiracial as necessary bridge-builders between families, cultures, and nations given their mixed lineage along with the idealized hope of 'ambiguous phenotypes' disrupting standard ways of organizing race (and thus, the argument goes, of disrupting racism)⁴⁷ persist through the confluence of normative models of mixed race. These models are too simplistic and end up reproducing a host of exclusivist normativities in the process. The goal of this study is thus to challenge these processes through an assessment, critique, and revisioning of what we take 'the multiracial' and 'mixedness' to *be* and to *bring forth* socially and politically. Rather than determining once and for all what mixed race is, I show how configurations of mixed race—as category, identity, and sociopolitical ideal—are problematic and thus need to be amended. In this way, my theoretical interests in this study lie *not* primarily interested in building a more inclusive *definition* of mixed race—so for example a definition that might include blackness or *Latinidad* or queer forms of kinship—though this is certainly important work. Instead, I advocate for a *conceptual revolution* in how we think about

⁴⁷ In the 125th Anniversary issue of *National Geographic*, the cover story ends with the author suggesting that a mixed, blended, or ambiguous 'look' can be an "opportunity," stating that "if we can't slot people into familiar categories, perhaps we'll be forced to reconsider existing definitions of race and identity, presumptions about who is us and who is them." See Funderburg, "Changing Face."

mixed race/multiraciality and related terms such as racial mixture, miscegenation, and interraciality.

IV. The Political Ontology of Race

Organized into five chapters, my methodology critiques the uses of history, conceptions of identity, organization of temporality, the naming of multiraciality and interracial intimacies, and the frame of the nation within mainstream politics of multiracialism in the U.S. Across these chapters, my positive project involves challenging and transforming standard notions of mixed race by way of placing it within a political ontology of race, a framework of analysis that understands race as neither a sociocultural or biological *given*, but “an explicit outcome of a politics” that “functions *as if* it were a metaphysical property across the *longue durée* of the premodern, modern, and now postmodern eras.”⁴⁸ To recall, a political ontology of race centers on an analysis of the historical-social schema instituted through the transatlantic slave trade and the system of racial chattel slavery that utilized a logic of antiblackness wherein the literal theft of human bodies from Africa that transformed human beings into property manifested an equation of ‘slaveness’ with ‘blackness.’ We have yet to fully reckon with the depths to which this logic pervades our social and political institutions, phenomenological experience, our ‘libidinal economy,’ psychic investments, and conceptual schemas, and so this politics is ‘ontological’ in its appearance as a ‘given’ that endures by way of its supposed naturalness.

According to Sexton (through recourse to Frank Wilderson), “the libidinal economy of antiblackness is pervasive, regardless of variance or permutation in its political economy” because

⁴⁸ Sexton (2010), 37.

what is still maintained is the “disposition that ‘with respect to the African shows no internal recognition of the libidinal costs of turning human bodies into sentient flesh.’”⁴⁹ While the specific political relations of force (chattel slavery) that instituted race have expired, the “application of slave law among the free” has persisted” as slavery’s ‘afterlife.’⁵⁰ As Saidiya Hartman describes (as quoted in Sexton), this as “a measure of man and a ranking of life and worth that has yet to be undone...a racial calculus and political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago.”⁵¹ We might then, as scholars like Joy James suggest, understand the Thirteenth Amendment to produce not an end to slavery but its reconfiguration given the clause that allowed for slavery in the case of ‘criminality.’⁵² In attending to history in a way that illuminates the continuities of past and present in regards to the political logics undergirding ‘race relations’ in the U.S. (but more broadly, as well), one can recognize the varieties of anti-blackness that persist “‘from slavery to mass imprisonment’ without losing track of its structural dimensions, its political ontology.”⁵³ Political ontology thus provides this structural reading of blackness as producing political *relations*, relations that generate a specific field of cultural integrity, legibility, and intelligibility.

In “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” Hortense Spillers shows how the transatlantic slave trade marked a historico-cultural rupture that instituted these political relations and fields of enunciation. This was achieved through the commodification of flesh and exploitation of female sexuality, which generated the distortion of human and cultural features and relations such as ‘gender formation,’ ‘kinship,’ and ‘maternity.’ The transatlantic slave trade marked a material and symbolic *theft* in that it enacted a displacement of Name and Land that

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Joy James. “Introduction: Democracy and Captivity.” *The New Abolitionists: (Neo) Slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings*. Edited by Joy James. State University of New York Press: New York, NY.

⁵³ Sexton (2010), 37.

inaugurated further displacement and distortion of patterns of relating and belonging. While Spillers focuses on the effects this has had for African American men and women (and specifically for ‘black women’ in the present), her analysis is of a whole system of meaning and forms of relating and belonging that become available in the historical cultural order inaugurated in the transatlantic slave trade. In what follows, I will briefly outline Spillers’ articulations in order to situate my claims about the import of a political ontology of race for discussions of mixed race in the present.

Spillers focuses in “Mama’s Baby” on how we come to think about gender in relation to African-American life in the U.S. The possibility of gender differentiation, she claims, is distorted and deformed in the process of cultural scission enacted in the Transatlantic slave trade and the literal and symbolic maneuvers of the slave ship. Captive bodies were ‘ungendered’—they were divested of personality, “suspended in the oceanic” as “undifferentiated identity,” “taken into ‘account’ as *quantities*.”⁵⁴

‘*Gendering*,’ Spillers contends, is a process unfolding within the “confines of the domestic” and “spreads its tentacles for male and female subject over a wider ground of human and social purposes.”⁵⁵ It is a domesticity that “gains its power” from the patronymic, or the Name of the Father—locating, naming, and covering persons in a space of cultural intelligibility, granting ‘symbolic integrity’ to a host of human social and cultural arrangements.⁵⁶ These arrangements

⁵⁴ Hortense J. Spillers. (1987). “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book.” *Diacritics*. 17.2, 72. Spillers notes here the literal quantifying of space granted for the African male and African female on the slave ship such that while the numbers are different, the terms of quantification are the same—“she is...quantifiable by the same rules of accounting as her male counterpart” (72).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ “‘Gendering’ takes place in the confines of the domestic, an essential metaphor that then spreads its tentacles for male and female subject over a wider ground of human and social purposes. Domesticity appears to gain its power by way of a common origin of cultural fictions that are grounded in the specificity of proper names, more exactly, a patronymic, which, in turn, situates those persons it ‘covers’ in a particular place. Contrarily, the cargo of a ship might not be regarded as elements of the domestic, even though the vessel that carries it is sometimes romantically (ironically?) personified as ‘she.’ The human cargo of a slave vessel—in the fundamental effacement and remission

were organized *through* and around the specific ruptures of humanity inaugurated by the slave trade, such that black/slave ‘reproduction,’ ‘gender,’ ‘kinship,’ etc. was made to serve this Patronymic Patriarchal order of social relations. The displacement of African bodies made for the distortion of such human and cultural features and forms of belonging. This is for Spillers a matter of “‘ungendering” and a deformation of kinship possibilities. The captive body reduces to a ‘thing’ for the captor, or the patriarchal master who has the *power* to name. Without a subject position, “the captured sexualities provide a physical and biological expression of ‘otherness”...and “this sheer physical powerlessness slides into a more general ‘powerlessness,”” resonating through various centers of human and social meaning.⁵⁷ The displacement of Name and Land occurring in the slave trade thus marks an irreparable inability for ‘black women’ and ‘black men’ to gain this ‘gendering’ cultural coherence and intelligibility.

In my descriptions thus far it may sound as if I am speaking within a frame that centers literal black and white people in my analysis. I wish to make clear that in talking about the historical rupture of the transatlantic slave trade and the logic of antiblackness that formed in its wake, my analysis serves the purpose of understanding the *historical symbolic order* in which we find ourselves and the depths to which this structures our everyday realities such that our available terms for thinking through this conditioning and ways to challenge it are *compromised* by the endurance of this order. We must begin by attempting to understand this order along with its pervasiveness, especially in arenas that purport to be ‘liberatory,’ such as dominant discourses on multiraciality in the past few decades. As Sharon P. Holland writes,

One could only think of ‘slavery’ as specific to the black body if we were to think of it in the narrowest of terms. We are not done with slavery because we have not yet to thoroughly investigate its psychic life....To rethink slavery among us is to take seriously the ways in which its logic of property, belonging, and family reshaped each and every one of those

of African family and proper names—offers a *counter*-narrative to notions of the domestic” (72)

⁵⁷ Ibid, 67

concepts *irrevocably*, as well as the lives of the subjects—black, white, native, Hispanic—who lived within this discursive logic.⁵⁸

We ought not relegate the potentials of intervening in the ‘discursive logic’ of slavery to black or white people or white-black relations. Instead, in attending to the functioning of mixed race within a political ontology of race, we accomplish the work that must necessarily and continually condition any discussions of ‘mixed race’ that position it within the frame of liberatory thought and politics. As Minele Mahtani reminds us,

It cannot be forgotten, as so commonly seems to happen now, that the history of multiraciality is a history of the racism that emerged directly out of transnational slavery. This history has implications not only for those who are part black but also for those who are of other racialized mixes. These myths clearly dictate how material representations and their subsequent powerful ideologies naturalize inequalities (see Saldanha 20006) and mask the relationship between the powerful and the powerless, creating geographies of exclusion.⁵⁹

Ultimately, a political ontology of race clearly rejects a notion of race as a natural or biological fact, but it is also importantly distinguished from a social ontology of race. In recent years decades, a biologically determinative vision of race has given way to a conception of race via social ontology. Race is now standardly considered a ‘social construct,’ as an effect of the actions and attitudes of individuals to make racial groupings salient and into ‘real, social kinds.’ Race is compared to other social kinds such as ‘money’ in that it produces something ontologically ‘there’ in the world, but is determined by social rules and habits for distinguishing racial groupings. According to a *social* ontology of race, then, racial differences can be elaborated and racial groupings can be determined as singular and representable *alongside* each other—racial groups can rise and fall in the degree to which they are recognized as a social kind without reference to their relation to other races. According to a *political* ontology of race, racial difference issues from

⁵⁸ Sharon P. Holland. (2012) *The Erotic Life of Racism*. Duke University Press: Durham, NC, 31.

⁵⁹ Minelle Mahtani. (2014) *Mixed Race Amnesia: Resisting the Romanticization of Multiraciality*. UBC Press: Vancouver, 36.

direct historical and present *relations of force*, within systems of white supremacy and antiblackness, such that race names the fate one ‘suffers’ or ‘enjoys’ in relation to this structural system.

A social ontology of race is thus able to consider race as something that is or could be politically *neutral*. What I mean by this is that it understands race as distinct groupings that are manifest through social processes but do not necessarily concern questions of normativity. A social ontology of race makes space for races to be recognized as social kinds that are not necessarily privileged or underprivileged but that can exist alongside one another. A political ontology of race makes the normativity of race in this historical social order explicit. It understands race as emergent through a schema in which one’s relation to ‘blackness’ depicts one’s relation to a system of material and symbolic violences.

Furthermore, a political ontology of race need not depend on whether race is biologically real and doesn’t presuppose a catalogue of human differences through which to appeal to in the formation of race. Rather, if the ontology of race is political, it is the philosophical study of the ‘being’ race has in political formation. This allows us to place as central the *structural* dynamics of race. It is a metacritique of what it means to be a political being so that as we consider forms of resistance, we center analysis on how categories are continually instituted and manifest various sociopolitical *relations*. This perspective does not accept putative understandings of ‘mixed race.’ It does not envision mixed race as something ‘identifiable’ or ‘codifiable.’ It hesitates at the moment of conceptual capture as an analytic category and substitutes instead an emphasis on the *how* of race, rather than the ‘what.’ A political ontology of race understands the ‘being’ of race as a matter of systems of oppression built to create and sustain certain patterns of relating and belonging. The goal then must be to build an understanding of how these systems of oppression

produce frames for analysis that maintain the status quo and from there attempt to build new logics, forms of sense, and conceptual linkages.

Instead of understanding ‘mixed or multiracial people’ or ‘interracial relationships’ as things in themselves, as properties assumed to exist that are verifiable through definitional clarity and a descriptive register, I seek a conception of mixed race that speaks to the *inability* of this term to gain coherence and conceptual clarity as a category. I do so not to suggest a wholesale rejection of this terminology, but to say that we need to understand it very differently and in the direction of liberatory thought and politics. To that end, I foreground the political, social, affective, epistemological, and historical processes that have undergirded and continue to undergird representations of race as a category of people with a certain subject position or experience upon which to build a politics of recognition. Instead I suggest forms of thought and practices that aim to counter these forms of consolidation, representationalism, and descriptive registers and build forms of liberatory praxis beyond them.

V. The ‘Event of Miscegenation’

How might we reconceive ‘mixed race’ within the frame of a political ontology of race? As I will advance throughout this project, if we understand the operation of mixedness and related terms through the structures of antiblackness and white supremacy, we cannot approach mixed race through a politics that seeks further recognition and description of the ‘existence’ of mixed race or ‘presence’ of mixed race people. As it stands, conceptions of mixed race oftentimes participate in a historical system that supports a range of oppressions—antiblackness, white supremacy, normative heterosexuality, to name a few. In attending to these limits of mixed race,

we can begin the process of thinking beyond these limitations, in the service of developing a logic that can produce different, more liberatory forms of relationality.

To this end, Sexton offers a helpful heuristic in the form of what he calls ‘the event of miscegenation.’ He distinguishes between “*miscegenation as interracial sex acts or the presence of mixed race people and miscegenation as event.*”⁶⁰ The latter is described as “what cannot be represented, conceptualized, or apprehended in either the interracial liaison or the multiracial body but rather is that which prevents either appearance from attaining a fixed and stable meaning, whether as object of aggression or desire.”⁶¹ Sexton is ultimately interested in thinking that wards against any understanding of “interracial sex or mixed-race people as *things in themselves.*”⁶² Beyond a framework of analysis that assumes race as a social category, he seeks the development of a schema troubling the idea that the “existence of people of mixed/ racial descent *in itself* might trouble the fantasy of pure races or discrete and rigid racial categories.”⁶³ At a deeper level, he wants to find a way to trouble “the fantasy of the subversive multiracial”⁶⁴ itself. Discourses on mixed race must undergo radical reevaluation. In the chapters that follow, I take up this work in various locales. In chapter one, I examine and critique the uses of history that often inform the Great Multiracial Hope. Typically, the history of race in the U.S. is understood as a history that *suppresses* mixed race and so it is assumed that the existence of multiraciality is something that needs to be *uncovered*. I argue that this is too simplistic a reading and the advancement of mixed race identity in this framework fails to consider a more robust historical understanding of the workings of race and mixed race. In chapter two, I explore mixed race and its sociopolitical

⁶⁰ Sexton (2008), 39.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid, 39-40.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 40.

potentials through analysis of the concepts of identity and intersectionality. I argue that intersectionality shows us what is at stake in conceptualizing mixed race identity, but does not itself give us a framework for thinking mixed race identity in a liberatory vein. Instead, we must first attend to the development of a more liberatory conceptual structure of identity. In chapter three I explore the temporal underpinnings of dominant mixed race politics embodying the sentiment of the Great Multiracial Hope, arguing for a more liberatory temporal schema informing multiracial politics today. In chapter four, I examine Ronald Sundstrom's articulation of 'responsible' multiracial politics, arguing that though his framework does not simplistically assess the existence of interracial intimacies as themselves salvific, it nevertheless participates in founding assumptions about the terms of mixed race and interraciality that undergird a schema of race that ought to be contested. In chapter five, I gesture at the political import of linking discourses on 'mixed citizenship status' families and relationships with discourses on multiraciality and interraciality.

Chapter 1
On the Uses and Abuses of History in Discourses on Mixed Race

Popular liberal mobilizations of ‘mixed race’ today would have us believe that mixed race is the future. As is often proclaimed, interracial marriages are on the rise and the numbers of multiracial people are steadily increasing. Babies of color are now the majority of babies being born in the U.S.⁶⁵ By 2042, we are told, the U.S. will be a ‘majority-minority’ nation.⁶⁶ “We are all mixed-race people,” says the off-script Bill Clinton.⁶⁷ This projected mixed race future (and the recouping of a mixed race past for the purposes of expressing a progressive continuity) is presented as not only noteworthy demographically, but affectively. So much hope is placed in mixed race ‘saving’ the nation from racism, which have led some editorial writings to go so far as to claim that mixed race people may act as a “vaccine” and “immunize” our country against the rising tides of the fascism of the Trump presidency. As the author of this particular piece concludes, “We may view Mr. Trump as part of the agony of metamorphosis. And we’ll see Mr. Obama as the first president of the thriving multiracial nation that’s emerging.”⁶⁸ It almost becomes unnecessary to qualify ‘multiracial’ with ‘thriving’ given the often unspoken valorization of mixed race/multiraciality in liberal, progressive circles. ‘Mixed race’ is figured as the harbinger of an inevitable racially harmonious future to come.

The ideal of amalgamation and integration, however, which has expressed itself in the terms of diversity, multiculturalism, and multiracialism in recent decades, is nothing new

⁶⁵ Kendra Yoshinaga. (2016). “Babies of Color Are Now the Majority, Census Says.” *NPR*. From <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/07/01/484325664/babies-of-color-are-now-the-majority-census-says>

⁶⁶Sam Roberts. (2008). “Minorities in U.S. Set to Become Majority by 2042.” *New York Times*. From <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/14/world/americas/14iht-census.1.15284537.html>

⁶⁷Edward Helmore. (2016). “Bill Clinton Tells Rally in Tennessee: ‘We are all Mixed-Race People.’” *The Guardian*. From <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/feb/14/bill-clinton-we-are-all-mixed-race-tennessee-rally>.

⁶⁸ Moises Velasquez-Manoff. (2017). “What Biracial People Know.” *New York Times*. From <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/04/opinion/sunday/what-biracial-people-know.html>

historically. As Tavia Nyong'o describes in *Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory*, "This faith in a national transcendence of race [through recognition of hybridity] is actually quite venerable, not just the effect of recent pre- and postmillennial effusions. It was already visible, for instance, during the antebellum struggle to abolish slavery."⁶⁹ And as Greg Carter traces in *United States of United Races: A Utopian History of Racial Mixing*, there has been, throughout history, an "optimist tradition" of "vanguards" who "[have] praised mixture as a means to create a new people, to bring equality to all, and to fulfill an American destiny"⁷⁰ and that "in every period, an optimistic stance has been as central to the American conversation on race as the pessimist."⁷¹ Frederick Douglass, in 1886, for instance, describes as "inevitable" the creation of a "blended race," noting that "Now, between these two extremes [black and white], an intermediate race has arisen, which is neither white nor black, neither Caucasian nor Ethiopian, and this intermediate race is constantly increasing."⁷² Throughout much of U.S. history, then, ideas of an always-impending amalgamated race have existed alongside ideologies of racial segregation and pathologization. Scholars like Carter track this "career of an idea"⁷³ over the course of history while Nyong'o tracks the specific conceptual and political work it is doing and has done. Nyong'o understands the persistence of this idea(l) of amalgamation as a *founding American national fantasy*, one in which "racial hybridity" is "not so much dismiss[ed] as *defer[red]*" throughout U.S. racial history.⁷⁴ Indeed it is part and parcel of its (racial) political structure, he argues, and it

⁶⁹ Tavia Nyong'o. (2009). *Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN, 9-10.

⁷⁰ Greg Carter. (2013). *United States of United Races: A Utopian History of Racial Mixing*. New York University Press: New York, NY, 3.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 5.

⁷² Frederick Douglass. (1886). "The Future of the Colored Race." From <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/the-future-of-the-colored-race/>

⁷³ Carter (2013), 5.

⁷⁴ Nyong'o (2009), 9.

is in this way that an oppressive status quo can be consistent with the vision of mixed race as the future.

In this chapter, I argue that the supposed newness of contemporary multiraciality survives precisely through the *historical repression* of the persistence of the figure of mixed race and its continual deferral. If, as Nyong'o argues, racial hybridity has persistently been "endow[ed] with the peculiar privilege and power of a horizon, one at which we never quite arrive,"⁷⁵ then we need to understand this mechanism of deferment as inherent to the ongoing racial project of the U.S., one that holds in place the status quo complete with its patterns of oppressive relationality, including, but not limited to, white supremacy, antiblackness, heteronormativity, settler-colonialism, and exclusivist nationalism. We cannot afford to simply embrace mixed race in the present as novel and potentially liberating. Rather, we ought to contest the very mechanism, what I call 'historical posturing,' that upholds the popular vision of the Great Multiracial Hope. In what follows, I offer a challenge to the reduction and distortion of history and politics upon which the Great Multiracial Hope rests. I first outline my understanding of historical posturing and explore the ways in which pro (mixed race)-identity scholars and movement activists have mobilized a conception of 'mixed race' in the present informed by this faulty approach to history. I figure the work of Naomi Zack as paradigmatic in this regard. I then offer a revised historical understanding of 'mixed race' that is informed by a *political ontology of race*, one that centers race as *political practice*, rather than a biological or sociological given. I ultimately argue that if we are to take seriously the history of race and concomitant notions of race mixture, miscegenation, mixed race, and multiraciality, we need an understanding of race as manifestly political that will in effect transform common sense notions about the being and temporality of 'mixed race,' 'racial mixture,'

⁷⁵ Ibid.

and ‘miscegenation,’ amongst others. I turn to the work of Jared Sexton in the concluding section to outline the beginning of this movement.

I. Pro-identity Scholarship and the Historical Posturing of Mixed Race

a. Historical Posturing

What I call ‘historical posturing’ has a close corollary in what Guy Emerson Mount refers to as ‘historical ventriloquism,’ or the strategy of “ignor[ing], marginaliz[ing], and even alter[ing]” the voices of prior thinkers in order to “meet the demands of a present day political project.”⁷⁶ I see the problem of historical *posturing*, however, as operating through a broader orientation to [and sensibility about] history rather than specifically attending to the alteration of individuals or ideas (though individuals and ideas are certainly occluded or puppeted in this practice). Historical posturing requires both the sectioning off of historical moments (clear distinctions between ‘past’ and ‘present’) as well as amplifying and solidifying singular points in/as a given historical moment and contrasting that sharply with the present.

I use the term ‘posturing’ in a few senses. A ‘posture’ refers to a particular pose or position (often of a person’s body) that is stable and unmoving. It can refer to both the ‘putting into position’ and the resultant position. In one sense, then, *historical* posturing refers to the solidifying and stabilizing of a given feature of historical content and/or a certain historical sensibility/attitude. It typifies a ‘holding in place’ of a historical event, regime, facet, or attitude and it does so specifically by offering this posture *as fully representative* of the historical matter in question. This

⁷⁶ Guy Emerson Mount. (2018). “Historical Ventriloquy: Black Thought and the Sexual Politics in the Interracial Marriage of Frederick Douglass.” In *New Perspectives on the Black Intellectual Tradition*. Edited by Keisha N. Blain, Christopher Cameron, and Ashley D. Farmer. Northwestern University Press: Evanston, IL.

is often done in order to relate the historical posture to the present (and by extension, a future) in a particular, often antagonistic way. This brings me to a second sense in which I use ‘posturing,’ which relates to the way a ‘posture’ is often an *exaggerated* pose or position. Historical posturing thus involves the exaggeration, amplification, or overestimation of some historical feature in order to relate it to a present and future seen as distinct from that feature. Finally, and relatedly, I think of posturing in the sense of deploying an attitude or sensibility that proceeds by distortion in order to make an impression or gain the upper hand. In the case of historical posturing, this comes through appeal to an implicit or explicit moral high ground, often involving the anachronistic appeal to terms, ideas, and power relations.

The specific case of historical posturing within pro-mixed race identity scholarship and movement politics involves [1] reducing and solidifying our understanding of racial history in the U.S. to a certain phenomenon—in this case, the ‘one drop rule’ and practices of hypodescent more broadly; [2] relating this representation of racial history to the present situation in a way that amplifies the supposed rigidity of race so that [3] one can describe a present day situation that is significantly *less* rigid and thus, more liberatory, thus granting one access to the moral high ground in the present. As I will show, this practice of historical posturing within mixed race movement politics and scholarship, however unintentional, demands critique. If mixed race has been *conceptually important* for building and maintaining intersecting patterns of oppression, as I will argue, then we need a *conceptual intervention* into the meaning and the being of ‘mixed race.’ In better understanding the depth and significance of ‘mixed race’ in the past and present, the hope is that we can produce future mobilizations of the term consonant with liberatory patterns of relating and belonging.

b. Pro-identity Approaches to Mixed Race and U.S. Racial History

The 1990s and early 2000s witnessed the rise of a body of scholarship acting as a theoretical corollary to the public policy and community building activism of the mixed race/multiracial movement. This scholarship, often now couched under the heading(s) ‘mixed race studies’ or ‘critical mixed race studies,’ elaborated a ‘new’ and ‘emerging’ mixed race/multiracial population. At base was interest in the changing mores of race, racism, and racial identity, with particular attention to psychological well being/self-esteem (for the mixed race child in particular) and the roles of family and kinship in imagining and understanding multiraciality and interracial relationships. Collections of essays such as *Racially Mixed People in America* (1992), *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier* (1996), *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity* (1995), *New Faces in a Changing America: Multiracial Identity in the 21st Century* (2003), and ‘*Mixed Race*’ *Studies: A Reader* (2004) sought to introduce the ‘contemporary phenomena’ of mixed race to the present-day scholarly archive.⁷⁷ In general, these early attempts at carving out a field, a space for articulation, either assumed or advocated recognition of a ‘mixed’ or ‘multiracial’ population and by extension, mixed race identity, though tactics and reasons for doing so were diverse.

Necessarily accompanying articulation of this ‘contemporary phenomena’ was commentary on the historical situation preceding this moment and the projection of a future to come. Reference to what Kathleen Korgen called the ‘biracial baby boom’⁷⁸—thought to be

⁷⁷ Maria P. Root. (1992). *Racially Mixed People in America*. SAGE Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA; Maria P. Root. (1996). *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier*. SAGE Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA; Naomi Zack. (1996). *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*. Roman and Littlefield: New York, NY; Loretta I. Winters and Herman L. DeBose. (2003). *New Faces in a Changing America: Multiracial Identity in the 21st Century*. SAGE Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA; Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe (2004). ‘*Mixed Race*’ *Studies: A Reader*. Routledge: New York, NY.

⁷⁸ Kathleen Korgen. (1998). *From Black to Biracial: Transforming Racial Identity Among Americans*. Praeger Publishers: Westport, CT.

spurred by the landmark *Loving v. Virginia* Supreme Court case invalidating laws preventing interracial marriage—was common, as was posing multiraciality as the historical target for suppression by the ‘one drop rule.’ In this way, scholars figured a historical racial *past* of mixed race through its suppression and a historical *present* via its awakening and recognition. Moments such as *Loving v. Virginia* were cited as historical-political turning points, *from which* scholars were able to project a more just, harmonious future free from a constricting racial past. The constriction of the past was also understood as a matter of neglecting racial ‘truths’ and matters of accuracy such that in emerging from its suppression, mixed race/multiraciality could now be embraced as a more accurate, truthful, racial representation. Implicit in this sentiment is that individuals *needed*, and perhaps even were *owed* this ‘more accurate’ portrait of their racial identity for matters of personal health and wellbeing.

The role of the one drop rule and hypodescent more generally was central to scholarship exploring the history and future role of mixed race in the U.S. Much work in this period focused on exposing what was deemed the ‘rigidity,’ ‘unfairness,’ ‘inaccuracy,’ ‘illogic’ and ‘harm’ of the one drop rule. Scholars such as Naomi Zack and G. Reginald Daniel expressed the sentiment that the ‘one drop rule [was] racist’⁷⁹ and that it was specifically harmful to and directly racist against those of ‘first generation mixture,’⁸⁰ who presumably, as Teresa Williams described it, suffered under the suppression of their multiplicity as multiracial individuals.⁸¹ These scholars identified the *form* of the one drop rule as itself inherently racist and thus the target of their concern because it ‘unfairly’ and ‘inaccurately’ bared some individuals from a white or multiracial identity,

⁷⁹ G. Reginald Daniel. Wright, L. (1994). “One Drop of Blood.” *New Yorker*.

⁸⁰ Zack, N. (1995a). “Mixed Black and White Race and Public Policy.” *Hypatia* 10.1,120–32.

⁸¹ Theresa Williams. (1996). “Race as Process: Reassessing the ‘What Are You?’ Encounters of Biracial Individuals.” Edited by Maria P.P. Root. *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier*. Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, 197.

‘relegating’ anyone with ‘one drop’ of black blood to the category of Black. Overall, the proposed newness, accuracy, and challenge of mixed race made sense through articulation of [1] a racial history in the U.S. nearly exhausted by the formal application of the one drop rule and [2] an understanding of the one drop rule as a direct assault on multiraciality. Racial classification and systems of racial oppression were no doubt advanced by and through instantiations of hypodescent throughout U.S. history, but in posing multiraciality as the primary target of the one drop rule, pro-identity politics and scholarship could articulate mixed race as a direct response/answer to a history of racism.

This approach, I claim, suffers from historical posturing. Pro-identity scholarship employed this method to advance a particular goal in the present: namely, recognition of something ‘new’ and significant called ‘mixed race’ and particularly, its embrace as a racial identity for a certain subset of people (and a more accurate and liberatory one at that).

c. Zack as Paradigmatic Posturer

In the remainder of this section, I explore the work of philosopher Naomi Zack, as it is paradigmatic of the historical posturing of the pro-identity position. Zack’s work was instrumental in the development of a theoretical exploration and defense of the movement for greater recognition of mixed race identity in policy and everyday life. Written in 1992, *Race and Mixed Race* was the first book length exploration of mixed race from a philosophical perspective.⁸² Here Zack argued that the biracial (black and white) classification system of the U.S. is itself racist, as are the racial designations that follow from its logic. All racial designations were themselves racist, for Zack, due to their illogic stemming from a lack of scientific validity; however, given that the

⁸² Zack, Naomi. (1994). *Race and mixed race*. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, PA.

current system of racial classification did not allow for ‘mixed race,’ Zack claimed that recognition of and identification as mixed race would upend this system and produce the effect of a raceless or antirace position. Her position is nuanced in the sense that she does not embrace mixed race as a permanent identity or solution to racism. Rather, mixed race identity, for her, is one step along the path toward a raceless or ‘antirace’ world. While ‘race’ is biologically *not real* (and thus should ultimately not be embraced by anyone), given the contemporary sociopolitical landscape wherein racial designation is salient and ongoing, individuals of mixed heritage ought to claim ‘mixed race’ status according to Zack. They ought to do so in order to challenge a system that erases this identity from the start, thus upending the logic of the system altogether. Zack 1) denies the scientific accuracy of race and racial designation of ‘black’ and ‘white’ and therefore 2) claims that race and racial designations do not (and should not) exist, while also claiming that 3) the racist binary system of race unfairly excludes and makes invisible (and actually makes ‘black’) those who are ‘mixed race’ and so 4) mixed race individuals ought to insist on such an identity as a way to resist the racism inherent in U.S. racial designations. Zack thus expresses some ambivalence about a mixed race position. It is necessary and useful, and indeed, potentially liberatory given the current binary system, but its use ought not be permanent; mixed race is proposed as a way to usher in a racial eliminativist or raceless credo, which Zack puts forth as the ultimate paradigm of racial justice.

I offer this brief meditation on the nuances of her argument in order to situate her work as one that takes seriously a range of concerns—metaphysical, ethical, existential, and political—and yet ultimately suffers from historical posturing. This has repercussions for the whole of her argument since her claims are advanced primarily *through* a particular use (or misuse) of history. Zack’s work, offered here as paradigmatic of the pro-identity position, appeals to the historical

archive in ways employing the three-fold sensibility/practice of historical posturing outlined above: namely, by 1) holding in place a certain feature and/or sensibility of history [historical record]—the one drop rule; 2) amplifying this feature in a way that reduces other salient factors such as the existence of categories of mixedness at various times throughout U.S. history and the fluidity, ambiguity, and contradiction *within* practices of race making, and finally; 3) using this distortion to gain a moral or sociopolitical advantage in the present by advocating for an embrace of an ahistorical and apolitical ‘mixed race’ position that has the power to challenge racism.

Like most pro-identity scholarship, the one drop rule is central to articulating a positive project for mixed race in *Race and Mixed Race*. The whole of Zack’s argument relies on her use of what she calls the ‘ordinary concept of race’ in the U.S. as a framing device. The ‘ordinary concept of race,’ according to Zack, is the ‘asymmetrical biracial schema of racial inheritance,’ which relies on the logic of hypodescent, or more colloquially, the ‘one drop rule,’ wherein one’s racial identity is aligned with one’s lower racial status parentage. As she argues, in a biracial schema (black and white) like the U.S., this rule makes it such that one can only be black or white, never both (or neither, for that matter). This has produced a history, according to Zack, that excludes ‘mixed race’ such that all those with both black and white forebears are black, thus disallowing the formation of any racial community of ‘mixed race’ across history. As Zack states,

[The existence of] mixed-race individuals is not recognized in the American biracial system. They are not identified as mixed race, they have no past family members who have been so identified and with whom they can identify, and there is no impersonal history of individuals of mixed race—all of the mixed-race people are black in the United States. It is therefore virtually impossible for individuals of mixed race, who should be acknowledged to exist, if races exist, but who are not so acknowledged, to have mixed-race identities.⁸³

⁸³ Ibid, 143.

Zack claims that because the one drop rule did not formally allow for the existence of ‘mixed race’ peoples, ‘mixed race’ has not existed. Here, she accepts the logic of ‘official’ policy as the arbiter of *what was recognized to exist* historically and contemporarily. The one drop rule, according to Zack thus exhausts (by suppressing) any notion of mixed race or racial mixture throughout history. Her understanding of mixed race is constrained to the recognition of the existence of *mixed race people*. As she writes, “Their existence as mixed-race individuals is not recognized in the American biracial system”⁸⁴ and so concludes that mixed race held no meaningful reality in U.S. American history outside of its suppression and denigration. To be sure, *at times* throughout U.S. history, categories of racial mixedness were denied within law, but this ought not exhaust one’s articulation of the role of ‘mixed race’ historically. Conceptually, it factored centrally, as I will go on to argue in the next section. Denying the fact that mixed race/racial mixture/interraciality operated in/as the case for continued articulation of the boundaries of racial groupings denies the fuller role of mixed race in history. Zack’s positioning of the one drop rule contributes to the historical posturing of mixed race in both the first and second sense outlined above. For one, the one drop rule is ‘postured,’ or held in place, as ultimate signifier of what mixed race has meant historically (in this case its meaning is presented as one of lack, suppression, or nonexistence) and secondly, it is amplified via its acceptance *as* racial history, *as* what made race, rather than as one aspect of a larger *practice of racialization*. This amplification produces an understanding of the operations of race as primarily stable, restrictive, and rigid. But historical record goes to show that while this may have been a stated *aim* of race making practices, it was never an achievement. Zack mistakes the formal instantiation of the one drop rule for the achievement of a racializing practice based in rigidity of racial categories.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 143.

The ‘ordinary concept of race’ is taken at face value, as if it brought into being that which it proposed to. Yet this is anything but the case. When Zack states the following: “The main philosophic criticism of the ordinary concept of physical race is this: There are no clear and uniform criteria by which the ordinary concept of race can be applied to every individual,”⁸⁵ she is correct in arguing that there was no clear and uniform criteria through which to apply the one drop rule, but this is not a *critique* of the one drop rule. Rather, it is a mechanism through which it operated. It was a simple fact of it, one that, as I will argue, was more readily acknowledged throughout history than we tend to think, even if implicitly or performatively. This inability and inconsistency of criteria was necessary to *generate* race as ongoing political practice. It was this instability, which expressed itself through a certain (white) anxiety about maintaining power and control that paradoxically motivated race *as a practice* that at times employed notions of purity to maintain itself. By accepting the one drop rule as exhaustive of racial history in the U.S., Zack postures a U.S. racial history without any notion of racial mixture or the instability, ambiguity, and contradictions wrought in racialization itself.

Finally, I want to address the ways in which Zack’s work showcases historical posturing by positing a clear break between past and present and by claiming a moral high ground in the present by means of producing a distorted vision of the past. Zack holds up, puts into position, or otherwise ‘postures’ the one drop rule as her target of analysis. In so doing, she directly contrasts a present and projected future with a stabilized past, not only descriptively, but normatively. In terms of the descriptive move, mixed race becomes something that is entirely ‘new’ since it never yet existed. As Zack states, “An American who identifies herself as mixed black and white race is a new person racially, because old racial categories do not allow her to identify herself this way.”⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Ibid, 15.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 164.

But beyond this, Zack uses a historical posture of the one drop rule that assumes the upper hand of the present/future in their potential to generate widespread embrace of mixed race identities. She does this by anachronistically reading into the past an inflated *choice* of embracing a mixed race identity (rather than a black identity).

In one of the most searing and confounding moments of *Race and Mixed Race*, Zack takes historical figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Zora Neale Hurston, and Langston Hughes to task for their ‘refusal’ to identify as mixed. She suggests that individuals *chose against* mixed race identity and thus were politically and morally lacking compared to those who choose to embrace a mixed race identity. Zack claims that the Harlem Renaissance’s “combined black community threw away any effective intellectual weapon against American racial designations, which is to say, against the core of American racism” and engaged in in “cultural suicide of mixed race”⁸⁷ by not embracing a specific category of mixed race (rather than a recognition of mixed heritage through the figure of blackness). As she puts it, “Designated American blackness, as a cultural force capable of defeating American racism, thereby cut off its own head during the Harlem Renaissance”⁸⁸ since those who could self-define as ‘mixed’ like Du Bois, Hurston, and Hughes did not do so. Hurston, for example, in her biography, *Dust Tracks on a Road* acknowledges her “mixed blood” and considers it “neither honor nor a shame,” yet names herself Colored, or African American.⁸⁹ Zack faults Hurston for ‘illogically’ identifying herself as Negro even as she simultaneously made mention of her mixed ancestral background. As Zack puts it, “Hurston illustrates all too well how morally good American identities of mixed race collapse into black racial identities. Such black identities may be admirable, but they are not logically or in fact identities of mixed race.”⁹⁰ Zack’s

⁸⁷ Ibid, 111.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 97.

⁸⁹ Zora Neale Hurston. (1996). *Dust Tracks on a Road*. Harper Collins: New York, NY, 191.

⁹⁰ Zack (1992), 146-147.

dismissal of Hurston's nuanced articulation of blackness emerges from the amplification of the one drop rule as *the* paramount functioning of racism and of race. If this is the case, then, the only way to contest race and racism (and for Zack, these are conflated) is to reject race and thus reject the one drop rule. She claims further that by embracing a black identity over a mixed race identity 'morally good American identities of mixed race' are foregone. Implicitly, then, we are to understand black identities for such mixed-heritage individuals as morally bad or suspect. Zack also faults Du Bois for identifying as black, stating, "If one is committed to a struggle anyway, why accept as parameters of that struggle, the parameters that have been drawn by one's oppressors?"⁹¹ Here Zack clearly identifies the one drop rule *as* the reigning and exhaustive parameters of U.S. racial (racist) history so that she can attempt to shatter these via an articulation of the ethical and political reasons one should embrace mixed race identity.

Zack's theoretical moves are premised on the idea of a racist history that is reduced to a racial classification system. Racist history becomes synonymous with a faulty form of classification. In making such sweeping gestures about the historical, (il)logical nature of race and racism in the U.S. she is able to claim mixed race as a, if not *the* challenge to past centuries of racist abuse. Since she assumes a history that did not include mixed race designation given the formal establishment of the asymmetrical kinship schema, mixed race becomes 'new' and excessive to a biracial system that is collapsible with racism itself. Mixed race identity is thus imbued with a mythic ability to transcend racism. For Zack, mixed race "would have to be an identity that looks to the future rather than to the past, an identity founded on freedom and resistance to oppression rather than immanence and acceptance of tradition."⁹² We thus arrive at the conclusion that the embrace of mixed race identity is what *makes* the future. Mixed race

⁹¹ Ibid, 105.

⁹² Ibid, 163-164.

becomes synonymous with the future while anything but its complete acceptance, as a category distinct from blackness, becomes a morally bankrupt, socially and politically ‘backwards’ position.

But what if instead of accepting the one drop rule as *the* story in regards to U.S. racial history of mixed race as Zack does, we understand this approach to history—what I am calling historical posturing—as a *continuation of* ‘parameters drawn by the oppressor.’ These are parameters that inhibit a conception of race and systems of oppression beyond surface level representations such as those encoded in law or otherwise more formal depictions. I therefore propose instead that we understand the history of race in the U.S. through a different valence, one in which attention is paid to the inherent instabilities, incoherencies, and ambiguities of race *as a practice*, which *involved* a conception of mixed race and racial mixture as foundational *to* rather than precluded *by* racializing processes, of which the one drop rule is but one example.

While Zack’s work is limited to the black/white binary schema, it is instructive more broadly in relation to the present concern: the uses of history/historical analysis in constructing a present politics of mixed race. I see Zack’s approach to history as paradigmatic of both the advancement of pro-black/white mixed race identity as well as dominant approaches to racial history in general that tend to obscure reference to race outside the black-white binary and assume purity or monoraciality of ‘black’ and ‘white.’ The fact that Zack frames her analysis through the black-white binaric system but without reference to the instability within these poles, is telling, since it mirrors dominant narratives of U.S. racial history that emphasize static and categorically distinct black-white (and sometimes Native) relations. In critiquing the kind of historical framing pro-identity scholars have utilized, not only is it important to trouble the proposition that U.S. racial history is primarily ‘black’ and ‘white,’ but it is also key to excavate the reduction of U.S. racial history to black-white conceptualizations in ways that neglect attention to the historical

complexities and dynamism *within* this normative, political, axiological structuring schema. Focusing on mixed race in its ‘biracial’ black and white valence, as if U.S. racial history could be dissected and carved out in this way, narrows and postures U.S. racial understandings even further. Common approaches to history, in their attempts to understand mixed race and multiraciality in the present, thus produce misunderstandings on multiple levels—both through the emphasis on of ‘black-white’ multiraciality in general, and the assumptions about blackness and whiteness throughout U.S. racial history that structure this framing.

In this reading, U.S. racial history is evacuated of all dynamism, ambiguity, and, contradiction, which as I go on to show, is fundamental to understanding practices of race making throughout history. This historical posturing makes ‘mixed race’ appear new and a challenge to racism. But if the history of racism and white supremacy in the U.S. has in fact *involved* ‘mixed race’—either in designations offered for classifying individuals or via conceptual necessity, then this historical posturing is not only inaccurate but dangerous in its potential to reproduce racist histories and present day conditions. In what follows, I offer a reading of race in the U.S. as historically and politically dynamic, arguing that this has repercussions for how we ought to envision ‘mixed race’ today if it is to have any relation to liberatory thought and politics.

II. The History of Race as the History of Race-Making

As I suggested in the opening of this essay, the ideal of amalgamation, multiraciality, hybridity, etc., has been a consistent feature of U.S. American history, something that existed *alongside* rather than *outside*, systems of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and exclusivist nationalism. The historical posturing within the pro-mixed race-identity movement, on the contrary, posits this ideal as a novel savior motif for histories of oppression. In this section, I

expand on the ways in which mixed race/racial mixture is manifest throughout history and is thus expressly *not* ‘new’ or a challenge to racism in the ways expressed by pro-identity scholars. I propose that this renewed understanding of mixed race historically both emerges from and inspires an approach to race and racism in the U.S. that can be described as a *political ontology of race*. In what follows, I first offer historical examples of the salience of mixed race/racial mixture to founding notions of race in the U.S. I then describe a vision of race and racism that disrupts the being and temporality of race and mixed race assumed in the historical posturing of pro-identity positions.

a. The Significance of Mixedness Within U.S. Racial History

The historical distortions and reductions evidenced in the historical posturing of pro-identity scholarship necessitate a more thorough reading of the history of mixed race. If mixed race is going to have any bearing on liberatory theory and politics in our present moment, a re-conceptualized account of the workings of mixed race throughout history is required. I explore this on two levels—firstly, in advancing a ‘fuller’ or ‘more thorough’ understanding of mixed race in history, I propose we acknowledge how categories of racial mixedness have coexisted *with* histories of oppression. If this is the case, there is no reason to suspect that the embrace of mixed race identity in itself will necessarily or even potentially bring about a more liberatory future. Secondly, outside of a simply more inclusive reading of mixed race history, I propose we broaden the scope of ‘mixed race in history’ to include not just the *existence* of ‘mixed race’ named through official channels and/or embraced as an identity by ‘mixed race peoples,’ but the *conceptual significance* it offers to founding political logics of race, the state, and (hetero) sexuality.

b. Recovering Examples of Racial Mixedness

To begin, we ought to complicate the idea that mixed race simply did not exist or was suppressed as a category of belonging historically. Census data reflect an ebb and flow of recognizing categories of mixedness. Between 1850 and 1910, for example, categories such as ‘mulatto,’ ‘quadroon,’ and ‘octoroon’ were recognized.⁹³ On the whole, the census reflects a variable and inconsistent approach to racial groupings and what those groupings signified throughout history. For example, the first categories represented on the U.S. census signified a metric that differentiated between ‘free persons’ and ‘slaves’ which changed only in 1820 with the addition of the ‘free colored persons’ category.⁹⁴ Therefore, if scholars such as Zack wish to place the onus on the one drop rule for the supposed nonexistence of mixed race they ought to limit their analysis to a very narrow part of history—particularly from 1920 on. This is complicated further, however, through the introduction of categories outside the black-white binary in 1860 with ‘Indian’ and in 1870, with fluctuating inclusion of categories such as Chinese, Japanese, Filipino Korean, Hindu, and Mexican.⁹⁵ These latter categories complicate understandings of racial mixture and what it means to be ‘mixed race’ in a couple of ways. For instance, ‘Chinese’ and ‘Hindu’ operated variably and ambiguously throughout the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, especially in regards to citizenship. As Kunal Parker writes, “a series of early-twentieth-century legal challenges by immigrants from the Near East, South Asia, and East Asia drove courts to wrestle with the meaning of race. Courts soon discovered that racial science yielded confusing

⁹³ Naomi Pabst. (2003). Blackness/Mixedness: Contestations over Crossing Signs. *Cultural Critique* 54, 180.

⁹⁴ Farah Z. Ahmad and Jamal Hagler. (2015). “Government Collection of Race and Ethnicity Data. *Center for American Progress*. Infographic.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

and undesirable results.”⁹⁶ Since citizenship was explicitly racialized, there was the question of whether these groups were ‘white’ and so could be naturalized, given that formal citizenship at this time was reserved for ‘free white persons’ and African Americans. Judicial cases ruled on Asian’s ‘nonwhiteness’ for inconsistent reasons. As Parker writes, “As scientific and common knowledge understandings of ‘whiteness’ pointed in different directions, courts began to confront the difficulties of determining ‘whiteness’ in naturalization cases,” resulting in one South Carolina federal court ruling on the naturalization petition of a Syrian applicant expressing frustration with the rhetorical question: ‘Then, what is white?’⁹⁷ Inconsistent reasoning often applied to cases of Asiatic immigration and naturalization. Take for examples in *Ozawa v. United States* (1922) a Japanese immigrant was declined naturalization on the basis of racial science as he was “clearly of a race which is not Caucasian” (152) but in *United States v. Thind* (1923), an Indian applicant was denied naturalization because ‘common knowledge’ of the ‘average man’ proved that, as the court instated, “there are unmistakable and profound differences between [the blonde Scandinavian and the brown Hindu] to-day.”⁹⁸ Racial science of the day included “Hindus” among the “Caucasian or white race,” and while racial science was used as the determining factor in *Ozawa v. United States*, it was eschewed in *United States v. Thind*. We might then understand these groups as multiply-raced, throughout time and place and contextually, based on the theoretical framework informing one’s analysis of racial categories. Additionally, the status of ‘Mexican’ in regards to race shifted throughout history and I would argue involved multiple racializations at once—for example, the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848 made all Mexicans within newly occupied U.S. territory citizens, and therefore ‘white,’ though for purposes outside

⁹⁶ Kunal M. Parker. (2015). *Making Foreigners: Immigration and Citizenship Law in America, 1600-2000*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 149.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 152.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

formal citizenship, Mexicans were racialized as nonwhite, ‘mixed’ in the sense that they were recognized as having Spanish and indigenous blood (rarely African, however).⁹⁹ We might understand the category of ‘Mexican’ as importantly part of the genealogy of ‘mixed race’ both in the sense that Mexicans were multiply-raced by the discrepancies between ‘official’ and everyday treatment and were recognized as a nonwhite category that had ‘mixed blood.’

c. ‘Mixture’ as Conceptual Necessity for Founding Logics of Race

Beyond the need to include these representations in a broader history of mixed race in the U.S., I want to express how racial mixture/mixed race functioned *conceptually* throughout U.S. racial history. In order to do this, I center on the *practices* of race-making that manifested, deployed, or assumed a notion of race mixture. The concept of miscegenation and the functioning of miscegenation law was one such space of enunciation. Miscegenation may seem like a straightforward practice of segregation, but as scholars like Peggy Pascoe show, it was a founding concept and practice of larger racial projects, namely white supremacy and white purity.¹⁰⁰ Present day celebratory embraces of interracial relationships eclipse a history in which defining and delineating the concept of miscegenation was central to oppressive racial and sexual projects. What I mean by this is that as history is postured in a way aiming to mobilize a certain movement in the

⁹⁹ Natalia Molina. (2014). *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*. University of California Press: Berkeley, CA, 24. As Molina writes, ““After the U.S. War with Mexico (1846-48), Mexicans entered the United States linked to two competing racial scripts: indigeneity and whiteness. The war and the ideology of Manifest Destiny that justified it highlighted Mexicans’ inferior racial position due to their indigenous roots. But in the aftermath of the war, under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexicans residing in the acquired territories were offered U.S. citizenship, a privilege extended only to whites at the time. These conflicting scripts that simultaneously marked them as legally white but socially and culturally ‘other’ and inferior would serve to complicate their status for generations to come” (24).

¹⁰⁰ Peggy Pascoe. (2009). *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 7.

present, we lose sight of the *process* of racial sense making. Instead we end up embracing its results ourselves even in the attempt to overcome them. Miscegenation or race mixing becomes straightforward knowledge when it was and remains anything but.

Concerns about race ‘mixing’ were apparent at the onset of colonial expansion and racial slavery in the U.S. Discussions in the 17th century typically involved judicial cases having to do with miscegenation.¹⁰¹ Indeed, these discussions molded what we take to be ‘miscegenation’ today and concomitantly, ‘racial purity,’ both of which I claim are creations that take place within a certain milieu of white supremacist race making practices. Anxieties surrounding racial differentiation were mediated by/through attempts to preclude ‘miscegenation,’ but in order to do so, one needed to know *when* miscegenation occurred (or would occur) which could only be done when one ‘knew’ what race individuals were. As Pascoe writes, “Miscegenation law made race classification seem to be imperative—that is, in order to determine who could and couldn’t marry, it was first necessary to identify every person’s race quickly and correctly.”¹⁰² These judicial cases, then, largely participated in the creation and maintenance of definitions of race by defining when miscegenation had occurred. Certainty of one’s race was a *need* provoked by the aims of white supremacy and racial slavery, mediated through claims about the ‘what’ and ‘when’ of miscegenation. Pascoe offers analysis of several cases throughout U.S. racial history wherein the courts were instrumental as a vehicle for race-making practices. But this process was not simply a top down mechanism wherein the State or other forms of bureaucratic authority made its assessment. Rather, she shows how there was a mix of ‘expert’ as well as ‘commonsensical’ analysis used to determine race. While ‘expert’ social scientific and theological approaches to race

¹⁰¹ Hickman, Christine B. (1997). “The Devil and the One Drop Rule: Racial Categories, African Americans, and the U.S. Census.” *Michigan Law Review*. 95.5.

¹⁰² Pascoe (2009), 111.

were drawn upon at various points in history, it was also typical (and perhaps more so) for judges to “[allow] lawyers to ask, and witnesses to testify, about a person’s ancestry, associates, and reputation in the community.”¹⁰³ Pascoe describes an operating assumption “that judges and juries produced a legal fact of race that would, presumably, mirror the natural fact of race...[which was] also presumed must exist, even, and perhaps especially, in cases where race appeared to be much less than obvious.”¹⁰⁴ This assumption existed alongside all evidence and experience of race as one of arbitrary distinctions. As Pascoe notes,

The perceived need to determine the legal ‘fact’ of race survived despite repeated criticisms of the contradictions, gaps, and logical deficiencies of the process of race classification. Indeed, it was a measure of the power of miscegenation law in this period that, although many people recognized the arbitrary nature of race classifications and some individuals succeeded in persuading courts they had been misclassified, no one succeeded in dislodging the imperative of race classification, which remained at the very heart of miscegenation law.¹⁰⁵

Miscegenation law, which did not simply legislate segregation, but brought into being that which was to be segregated, was foundational to the history of race in the sense that it mandated racial classification and distinction.

d. The Role of Whiteness

The creation of miscegenation law quite transparently reflected a hierarchy of ‘purity’ wherein “although the list of races named in each law varied, from state to state and law to law, every miscegenation law banned Whites from marrying Blacks.”¹⁰⁶ We need to understand this practice of race-making as deliberate in its creation and maintenance of a whiteness that could

¹⁰³ Ibid, 113-114.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 114.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 112.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 8.

retain its power *with and through* racial mixing. White supremacist interests in the form of white identity were protected by the maintenance of a blackness that was the negation of whiteness. Laws aiming to prevent mixing did so to prevent a particular *kind* of mixing; it was not simply ‘purity’ (as if this existed as a thing to protect) that was at stake. As the administrative state grew and sought to multiply the races under its domain, “a theoretical commitment to racial purity [translated] into an actual commitment to white supremacy by using the legislative and administrative race-defining powers of the state to protect only the racial purity of Whites.”¹⁰⁷ As Pascoe goes on to describe, “Miscegenation laws actually prohibited Whites from marrying other groups, like ‘Negroes,’ ‘Mongolians,’ or ‘Malays,’ without prohibiting ‘Negroes,’ ‘Mongolians,’ or ‘Malays,’ from marrying each other.”¹⁰⁸ This history is key to note because it does not escape us in the present. Though the rates of ‘interracial marriage’ is rising, it is rising for a specific subset of ‘inter’ racial—namely, black and white intermarriages still remain less common than nearly any other racial combination.¹⁰⁹ Additionally, rates of interracial marriage are quite specific to region and we see much more of a concentration in California over Alabama, for example.¹¹⁰

The extent of the oppressive legal and conceptual tactics of white supremacy does not end there. Not only did anti-miscegenation law appear hyper-interested in legislating relationships between whites and blacks above any nonwhite interracial partnering, but it actually *incorporated* mixture for whites, albeit again, a very specific kind, which nearly always excluded blackness. Arica Coleman’s work on the history of white, black, and native relations in Virginia articulates precisely this. By the turn of the twentieth century, European, African-descended and native

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 120.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Gretchen Livingston and Anna Brown. (2017) “Trends and Patterns in Intermarriage.” *Pew Research Center*. From <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2017/05/18/1-trends-and-patterns-in-intermarriage/>

¹¹⁰ Gretchen Livingston. (2017). “In U.S. Metro Areas, Huge Variation in Intermarriage Rates.” *Pew Research Center*. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/05/18/in-u-s-metro-areas-huge-variation-in-intermarriage-rates/>

peoples had been intermixing for hundreds of years all the while laws were instituted to prevent this. As Coleman describes, “when the law failed in preventing racial intermingling between Whites and non-Whites, Virginians responded by ‘drawing strict racial boundary lines, defining some mixtures as white and others as mulatto.’ In other words, some mulattoes were declared legally White.”¹¹¹ Because racial purity is something *created* and *managed* precisely through attempts to describe what is meant by purity, definitions of racial categories, even those purported to advance (white) purity, often included what we would consider ‘racial mixture.’ For example, “In 1705 a mulatto was defined as the child of a White and an Indian or the child, grandchild, and great-grandchild of a White and a Negro. Consequently, as legal scholars have explained, ‘Someone with one Indian parent and three white grandparents was, by implication, legally white.’”¹¹² Additionally, as racial definitions continued to be instituted amidst a history and present that could never be contained in rigid, conceptually pure categories, there were moments wherein whiteness morphed into what we might presently understand as a ‘mixed race category.’ As Coleman writes,

The 1785 [Virginia] statute that redefined mulatto as a person with one-fourth or more Negro “blood” widened the opportunity for some within the colored population to become legally White. As a result, ‘the effect of statutes defining a mulatto as someone with a certain proportion of Negro or Indian blood was to make ‘white’ into a mixed race category.’¹¹³

Noted slave-owner, author of the Declaration of Independence, and third President of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, spent copious amounts of ink outlining precisely how “a mulatto could become legally White”¹¹⁴ and how once a slave was emancipated, he becomes a free white man.

¹¹¹ Arica Coleman. (2013). *That The Blood Stay Pure: African Americans, Native Americans, and the Predicament of Race and Identity in Virginia*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington, IN, 94.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 94,95.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 95.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*.

These attempts at definition and their inherent paradox, confusion, contradiction, and ambiguity were reflected in the matter of Jefferson's own children with Sally Hemmings, wherein upon Jefferson's death, one of his sons was classified as white and the other as coloured in the 1830 census. Race mixture itself never produced 'one thing' in the sense of repeated results legally, politically, and socially. This is why, as I will go on to argue, neither 'race' nor 'mixed race' is something that can be *represented* singularly and categorically. Racial terms were terms of political and social access to power as well as legal 'freedom' rather than a representation of difference that was simply extant. Conceptually, then, the history of 'race' in the U.S. was more so one of fluidity rather than rigidity in the sense that the need to continually institute racial definitions in order to curb mixture manifested in racial designations that defined 'purity' as 'mixture.'

This brief look into miscegenation law as well as laws attempting to institute purity in race classification show how, while on the face of it these laws sought the *prevention* of racial mixture, they more holistically focused on *organizing patterns of belonging and legitimizing certain forms of mixture*. This recognition of and use of mixture throughout U.S. racial history shows us a few things. For one, the 'one drop rule' or more broadly the law of hypodescent was not exhaustive of the racial history in the U.S. Categories such as mulatto and octoroon were present at various times in U.S. census history, but not only that, within those instances commonly regarded as legislating the one drop rule—for example, with the Racial Integrity Act (RIA) of 1924 in Virginia—one should notice how mixedness was incorporated in 'pure' categories. One of the most interesting parts of the RIA is how it explicitly included as white those with Indian ancestors. And if blackness involved a logic according to 'one drop' it was one that involved mixture as well. I am not saying that we should understand whiteness and blackness as similarly 'mixed' in terms of recognizing

and celebrating a certain fluidity and mixture of race historically. Rather, in understanding mixedness as fundamental to and included within ‘pure’ racial categories, then we need to revise our understanding of mixedness in the present as ‘new,’ ‘accurate,’ and/or somehow itself a threat to racism.

We exaggerate the extent to which the assumed *result* of hypodescent-structured naming-practices—the creation of ‘biracial asymmetrical schema’ of white and black populations—shaped racial histories in the U.S. The consolidation of formal law and policy suggest mainly the (failed) attempt at providing a coherent and repeatable basis for racial categorization. What is more interesting and what should be more central to our understanding of race are the very ways in which social, political, legal, interpersonal *practices* showcased contradiction, ambiguity, and fluidity rather than the rigidity suggested by the one drop rule. As Ariela Gross writes, “Even where the one drop rule was invoked, it rarely decided actual cases. Because blood could not be scientifically evaluated or ancestry known for certain, juries determined race on the basis of other types of evidence.”¹¹⁵ This ‘rule’ is simply one effect of *what race is*, namely the practice of instituting sets of material relations, which, historically, have involved the calculation of humanity into more, less, or not human along with the development of an aesthetic, axiological, political, social, ontological, and existential repertoire to that end. In what follows, I outline the conceptual framework that I argue informs and emanates from the historical retelling of the role of mixed race in U.S. history.

III. The Political Ontology of Race

¹¹⁵ Ariela J. Gross. (2008). *What Blood Won't Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 44.

Largely, the history of race in the U.S. has been the history of attempts to define what it is, often to no coherent avail, and often in the service of maintaining a white supremacist state. We have tended to mistake race as something definable even in the professed service of challenging racism and other oppressions. What I aim to show is that understanding race historically does not mean we must concede race *as* something identifiable. Moreover, understanding race *requires* this hesitation in definition, as does the development of liberatory approaches to our inherited notions of race and mixed race. It is this necessary hesitation and revisioning, I argue, that will prove generative of liberatory patterns of belonging/relating. As shown, racial designations shift given time and place and are thus fundamentally unstable. This *practice* of race (-making), then, is the history of race. In understanding race as emergent through political practice we can orient ourselves to an ontology that is fundamentally mixed, queer, ambiguous, multiple, contradictory, incoherent, and otherwise dynamic.

Philosophers Robert Bernasconi and Michael Monahan offer meditations on this type of reconceptualization of race. Rather than a stable given that could be easily classified based on lineage and biology, race is more of a “border concept” according to Bernasconi in that it fundamentally concerns negotiations about individuals who trouble the borders of racial categories.¹¹⁶ Instead of posing mixed race as a *challenge* to a history of racism, then, ‘race as border concept’ allows us to think about how ‘racial mixedness’ was *central* to race in that it provoked concerns of definition. As Ariela Gross writes, “People revealed what race meant for them only when they needed to adjudicate its boundaries. And in drawing these boundaries, they were creating race.”¹¹⁷ For example, after years of ‘mixing’ (in the form of rape and sexual

¹¹⁶ Robert Bernasconi. (2012). “Crossed Lines in the Racialization Process: Race as a Border Concept.” *Research in Phenomenology* 42: 206-228.

¹¹⁷ Gross (2008), 11.

exploitation) between white male slave owners and female slaves, further laws emerged aiming to differentiate categories of individuals—as ‘free colored persons’ in the 1820 census and ‘black slaves,’ ‘black,’ ‘mulatto slaves,’ and ‘mulatto’ in the 1850 census.¹¹⁸ This is likely in part because of how “already in the eighteenth century visitors to Monticello saw slaves that they regarded as having no visible trace of African ancestry” and so in order to uphold the system of racial slavery, we see people like Thomas Jefferson painstakingly attempting to articulate a coherent system for understanding racial categorization. ‘Mixed race’ does not lie ‘outside’ of histories of race, therefore; rather, it is part of a fuller conceptualization of the *dynamism* of U.S. racial history and the ways in which race was a political practice *of* definition. By shifting our orientation to ‘race’ in this way, I do not mean to suggest the other extreme—that ‘mixed race’ as a concept will necessarily be part of the structure of racist practices of race-making—rather, I wish to suggest that only when we acknowledge the uses of racial mixedness historically can we begin the work of naming mixed race in a lexicon of liberatory thought.

In similar ways to Bernasconi, Monahan locates the ontology of race prior to the moment of capture in/as descriptors of specific mutually exclusive categories of human belonging. Instead, Monahan posits race as fundamentally a status of becoming rather than being. Our racial categories, as he puts it, are “fraught with ambiguity, indeterminacy, and even outright contradiction” and so part of *racism*, which he describes as a “politics of purity,” is the denial of and covering over of this dynamism.¹¹⁹ The historical posturing of present day politics of mixed race, I would argue, is one instantiation of covering over this dynamism and so plays a role in upholding patterns of oppression rather than dismantling them. Bernasconi and Monahan each

¹¹⁸ Farah Z. Ahmad and Jamal Hagler (2015).

¹¹⁹ Michael J. Monahan. (2011). *The Creolizing Subject: Race, Reason, and the Politics of Purity*. Fordham University Press: New York, NY, 75.

challenge the hermeneutical closure that sociopolitical practices of race have instantiated historically. They do so by developing a conceptual structure of race that is active, dynamic, and fundamentally about the instability, uncertainty, and contradictory nature of race. Both of these reformulations of understanding the race concept—as a border concept and as a matter of becoming—help broaden our frame of analysis for understanding the relation between race and liberatory thought and practice. It challenges the assumption that the ‘what’ of race is one of classification and organization into human groups that are simply either wrongly grouped and/or wrongly treated.

As described, Zack and other pro-identity scholars identify the ‘what’ of race as primarily a classificatory concept that involves differentiating groups and concomitant differential treatment in terms of both access to material goods as well as social status. Zack locates the problem in the faulty classification that begets certain material and social injustices. This is why she identifies the embrace of mixed race identity as the step towards destroying the classificatory mechanism of the one drop rule, and in effect, for her, destroying the system of racism. While it is true that classification is one resultant representation of race, I argue that it is not the *whole* of understanding the race concept; it is not what makes race. Instead, we need to understand race *as the continued operation of attempts at classification*, involving a range of mechanisms throughout U.S. history that have all maintained a sociopolitical order of antiblackness, white supremacy, and xenophobia, amidst other oppressions. Theorist Patrick Wolfe distinguishes between these two levels of understanding race in the following:

As performed and contested on the ground...race emerges not as singular or unified but as a fertile, hydra-headed assortment of local practices. To express this applied versatility, we may distinguish between race as doctrine, which is a of a piece with Enlightenment thinking and has a measure of discursive coherence, and racialization as an assortment of

local attempts to impose classificatory grids on a variety of colonized populations, to particular though coordinated ends.¹²⁰

Removing one classificatory approach does not prevent the institution of another and so, in understanding race *as* classificatory practice rather than the result of a singular classification scheme, we are positioned to both better *expose* the depths of racism and better *propose* questions and answers to the problem of liberatory praxis. In understanding the ways in which mixedness is implicated within systems of oppression, we might begin to devise conceptualizations of mixed race (and identity) explicitly *outside of or in resistance* to those. But this first involves a reorientation to race (and identity, as I explore in chapter two) in the form of a *political ontology of race*.

As I understand it, a political ontology of race is presented over and against a biological or sociological reading wherein it is assumed that underneath the racist operations of race, there is a neutral (apolitical, in this regard) point at which race can meaningfully correspond to ‘what exists,’ what is ‘out there.’ It presumes a positivist sense of discovery or correct arrangement made possible by what is thought to be biologically, socially, or culturally ‘given.’ It is the understanding that ‘race’ is the social or political *manipulation* of existent differences between humans—whether these are thought to be biogenetical, social, or cultural—rather than the production of what is understood to count as difference in the first place. Race as *political ontology* thus runs deep—it is a matter of understanding what it means to be understood as a sociopolitical subject. It shows how political life is made possible by racial division. For example, if, as in the seventeenth and part of the eighteenth century, political life was structured through the frame of ‘free’ vs. ‘unfree,’ which was mapped on to white vs. slave, and if slavery was synonymous with blackness, then race becomes manifest as a condition of civil society. Likewise, we can take the example of

¹²⁰ Patrick Wolfe. (2016). *Traces of History: Elemental Structures of Race*. Verso: London, UK, 10.

naturalized citizenship, which has historically been synonymous with whiteness in the U.S.—up until 1952 in a *de jure* sense¹²¹ and continuing to operate in a *de facto* sense today. If whiteness is synonymous with citizenship and the nation-state is made possible by the idea of citizenship, then we have the political instantiation of race. We can further understand contemporary equations of blackness with criminality as an effect of the political ontology of race. If law is foundational to civil society and understandings of the state, then race is ‘produced’ in this matrix of proximity to being understood as ‘law-abiding.’

Political life is *conditioned by* the idea of ‘race.’ Thus, a political ontology of race need not depend on whether race is biologically real and doesn’t presuppose a catalogue of human differences through which to appeal to in the formation of race. It also evades a certain understanding of social construction that maintains a sociological rendering of human difference. Rather, if the ontology of race is political, it is the philosophical study of the ‘being’ race has in political formation. This allows us to place as central the structural dynamics of race, rather than the (re)arrangement of identities, classificatory schemes, or interpersonal or even institutional interactions. It is a metacritique of what it means to be a political being so that as we consider forms of resistance we center an analysis on and learn to reckon with the multivalent functioning of the current political order.

These lines of thinking offer a robust approach to racial history and help develop a political ontology of race that, as Alexander Weheliye describes,

Construe[s] race, racialization, and racial identities as ongoing sets of political relations that require, through constant perpetuation via institutions, discourses, desires, infrastructures, languages, technologies, sciences, economies, dreams, and cultural

¹²¹ Ian Haney Lopez. (2006). *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race*. New York University Press: New York, NY.

artifacts, the barring of nonwhite subjects from the category of the human as it is performed in the modern west.¹²²

In this reading, race is figured “not as a biological or cultural classification but as a set of sociopolitical processes of differentiation and hierarchization, which are projected onto the putatively biological human body.”¹²³ Weheliye centers processes of political violence like white supremacy, heteronormativity, and antiblackness in his reading of race so that race is not reproduced *as* definition—as either biological, cultural, or any other type of classification, but as instead the “*ongoing* sets of political *relations* [emphasis mine],” which institute a stratification and hierarchy of humanity into the more-, less-, and non-human.¹²⁴ Jared Sexton similarly articulates this approach to race:

[Race’s] political ontology exceeds the terms of sociological investigation and the operations of the symbolic order: it is, to try another phrasing, a ‘division of species’ (Fanon 1963) effected and maintained by the technologies of violence and sexuality that underwrite the social formation, not a discriminatory manipulation of already existing bodily marks (Guillaumin 1995).¹²⁵

Emphasizing race as an ongoing set of political relation invites us to consider how exactly ‘mixed race’ has figured and continues to figure into a pattern of white supremacist, antiblack political relations. Only then might we develop a notion of ‘mixed race’ that can challenge these and other systems of oppression.

In the prior section I argued that a more thorough approach to the history of mixed was required at two levels—1) *recovery* of key factors of historical record and 2) *reorientation* of race conceptually. These are interrelated given how recovery often forces a new or different

¹²² Alexander G. Weheliye. (2014). *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Duke University Press:Durham, NC, 3.

¹²³ Ibid, 5.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Jared Sexton. (2008). *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN, 11.

perspective. The perspective I advance, however, ultimately understands recovery or inclusion of key points or figures in history as secondary to the primary need to reorient the very ‘being’ of race (and thus mixed race) in the first place. This perspective does not accept putative understandings of ‘mixed race.’ It does not envision mixed race as something ‘identifiable’ or ‘codifiable.’ It hesitates at the moment of conceptual capture as an analytic category and substitutes instead an emphasis on the *how* of race, rather than the ‘what’—but without fully eschewing the ‘what’ either. Rather, the ‘what’ of race is reconfigured *as* this unstable, ambiguous, contradictory process, without end. Race *is* political practice in the sense that its meaning is acquired by and through a political-epistemological-axiological schema informed historically in this case by the interlocking systems of transatlantic slavery, antiblackness, settler-coloniality, and white supremacy and nationalism. What I mean by this is that a political ontology of race understands the ‘being’ of race as a matter of systems of oppression built to instantiate and sustain certain patterns of relating and belonging. The goal then is to begin with an understanding of how these systems of oppression produce frames for analysis that maintain the present. As I’ve argued, one of the ways this is done is through the impulse to assume classificatory systems as the ‘what’ of race rather than one seeming result of its being as political practice. When we begin with the will to more fully understand the mechanisms of oppressions, we can begin the movement of producing more liberatory, against the grain, patterns of relating and belonging.

IV. The Theoretical Reversal of Mixed Race and the ‘Event of Miscegenation’

To conclude, I offer a meditation on ways to think and talk about mixed race, racial mixture, and miscegenation that is informed by a political ontology of race, one that centers the

role of white supremacy, antiblackness, and normative heterosexuality, amongst other systems of oppression. Jared Sexton offers one of the most sustained analyses of the depths of oppression, in response to the hopes and aims of the multiracial movement. I believe we need to start here—with critical attention to the terms used and the assumptions made in any attempt to challenge forms of oppression and offer liberatory possibilities. In what follows, I explore Sexton’s positions on the conceptual and temporal directionality of mixed race and his proposal to understand *miscegenation as event* as distinct from *miscegenation as interracial sex acts* or *the presence of mixed race people*.¹²⁶

Sexton begins with the articulation of a fundamental aspect of the political ontology of race. As he states,

Racial difference *issues* from direct relations of force—the scales of coercion—and is only elaborated or *institutionalized* within relations of power—the scales of consent. What establishes race, what positions one within racial formation, is the relation one suffers and/or enjoys with respect to the state-sponsored social organization of violence and sexuality.¹²⁷

Before making claims about the ability of mixed race to act in a novel savior modality, we ought to understand that ‘mixed race’ as a distinct category of analysis or identity, one that relates to a specific class of peoples, however described, ultimately issues from a certain historical political field—one in which racial slavery, antiblackness, white supremacy, and normative heterosexuality have reigned (and continue to do so in various ways). And so, as Sexton states, “One cannot address the notion of multiracial identity without broaching a discussion of the politics of interracial sexuality.”¹²⁸ Ultimately, then, we must “repoliticize the unstable juncture of race and sexuality in ways that avoid the pitfalls of reification.”¹²⁹ In what proceeds, I focus on this

¹²⁶ Ibid, 39.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 9.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 15-16.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 9.

expressed goal, articulating the ways in which Sexton refigures terms like ‘racial mixture,’ ‘miscegenation,’ ‘impurity,’ and ‘hybridity’ within a structural political milieu of white supremacy and antiblackness.

As the previous section aimed to show, the motivation to delineate clear distinctions among ‘races’ arose “*through* the image of ‘copulation, of couplings, fusing, coalescence, between races’”¹³⁰ and so as Sexton writes,

This indicates a shift of perspective that could and should have a transformative effect on the ways that ‘hybridity’ or intermixture is thought about in the field of racial theory. Put simply, racial *differences* are elaborated out of the tableau of *mixture*; they depend on it for their articulation, their social existence, however tenuous and provisional.¹³¹

In understanding race and mixed race, then, we need to invert the assumption that ‘mixed race’ follows from ‘race’ (understood as a marker of sociocultural or biological differentiation) and instead consider its functioning as a political-conceptual tool for maintaining certain structurings of society. This wards against repeating the founding national fantasy of always-deferred amalgamation and is thereby a step along the way of manifesting a different, more liberatory sociopolitical order. I do not mean to suggest that this is *all* ‘mixed race’ could be, but rather that any attempt to think its role outside one that is foundational to the contemporary racial regime will have to involve at base the reformation of our current sociopolitical order. This is to say that we cannot put any faith in the existence and activity of ‘mixed race’ *itself* in addressing systems of oppression. We require instead a radical political, social, epistemological, and axiological shift that might *allow for* the emergence of ‘mixed race’ as something other than part and parcel of an ongoing matrix of oppressions.

In “The Consequence of Mixture: Racialised Barriers and the Politics of Desire,” Sexton

¹³⁰ Ibid, 34.

¹³¹ Ibid.

develops this line of thinking by offering three main points. He first figures whiteness as emergent *from* the law of anti-miscegenation, rather than that which is *maintained through* the law of anti-miscegenation. He then articulates the contemporary transgression of this law as a “revalorized deployment of racialised sexuality” or what he identifies as “anti-anti miscegenation” or “multiraciality.”¹³² Finally, he offers “‘the event of miscegenation’ as that which provokes and exceeds both anti-miscegenation and its opposition.”¹³³ Sexton engages in an experiment of thought wherein miscegenation is figured as “theoretically prior to racial categories”¹³⁴ rather than what is typically assumed: that there are first ‘races,’ however construed, biologically or sociologically, and then these races ‘intermix.’ In so doing, he aims to work outside the framework of even radical critiques of racial essentialism and those that might suggest that “human history is characterised by intermixture and therefore, in an empirical sense, the races are thoroughly mixed”¹³⁵ as if this is a rebuttal to stated aims of segregation and racial purity. Instead, Sexton seeks an entirely different theoretical framing and thus opens up space for questions concerning the “social mechanisms” by which “races [are] produced or reproduced, perhaps especially in discussions of miscegenation.”¹³⁶ For, it is not the case that he seeks simply a historical counter-narrative of race and mixed race in his efforts to figure mixture as *prior*, but an entirely different form of sense-making and a social-political schema that makes transparent the vehicle(s) by which oppressions repeat themselves. This is why, as I outlined in the previous section, we must seek not only *recovery* of examples of mixed race in history, but produce a radical *reorientation* to race, history, and political formation. To be sure, these are related, but ultimately, the work of liberatory

¹³² Jared Sexton. (2003). “The Consequence of Mixture: Racialised Barriers and the Politics of Desire.” *Social Identities*. 9.2, 246.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 260.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 246.

thought and practice requires the creation and maintenance of social, political, epistemological patterns of relating that exceed the schemas we have inherited.

Sexton's first point—that “the law of anti-miscegenation is the founding gesture of whiteness” works in conjunction with the second—that contemporary (and revalorized) transgression of this law be modeled as “multiraciality, *mestizaje*, or anti-anti-miscegenation.”¹³⁷ Together they aim to articulate the theoretical reversal from race→mixed race to mixed race→race. If it is the foundational structures of society we are interested in interrogating and transforming, then we ought to understand the symbolic and conceptual milieu through which they emerge and are consolidated. Rather than take as given terms of race as if they existed prior to racist manipulation or could somehow be presented as neutral representations, Sexton begins by refusing that there is such a *thing* as miscegenation. Instead, he situates this term's (and its antithesis's) circulation in oppressive structurings of society. Sexton's final point, then, on the idea of miscegenation *as event* is the unifying conceptual feature of his theoretical reversal.

The “event of miscegenation” is a helpful heuristic for understanding the temporal reversals and radical sense-making Sexton issues. He draws a distinction between *miscegenation as interracial sex acts* or *the presence of mixed race people* and *miscegenation as event*.¹³⁸ The latter is described as “what cannot be represented, conceptualized, or apprehended in either the interracial liaison or the multiracial body but rather is that which prevents either appearance from attaining a fixed and stable meaning, whether as object of aggression or desire.”¹³⁹ With this proposal, Sexton is ultimately interested in thinking that wards against any understanding of “interracial sex or mixed-race people as *things in themselves*.”¹⁴⁰ Beyond a framework of analysis

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Sexton (2008), 39.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

that assumes race as a social category, he seeks the development of a schema troubling the idea that the “existence of people of mixed/ racial descent *in itself* might trouble the fantasy of pure races or discrete and rigid racial categories.”¹⁴¹ At a deeper level, he wants to find a way to trouble “the fantasy of the subversive multiracial”¹⁴² so as to, in a vein similar to Nyong’o, ward against the continuation of the founding “American national fantasy” of amalgamation and its continual deferment.

In this different framework, ‘miscegenation’ becomes part of a larger conceptual apparatus of racial formation making “‘race mixture’...a structural element in the fiction of race purity” rather than its challenge. In this reading, ‘race mixture’ is that which has been *retroactively* offered as either what should be warded against (the conservative, traditionally racist line about the need to protect racial purity) *or* the antidote to a racist system (liberal, progressive notions of mixed race as the future). Sexton’s line of argument thus positions ‘miscegenation’ as a “precious renewable resource” for “white supremacy and antiblackness...a necessary threat against which they are constructed, a loyal opposition, a double exposure,”¹⁴³ which manages to keep race a *problem* and so manages to maintain it at all, if its existence *is* a matter of political ontology. He continues, “[white supremacy and antiblackness] *rely* upon miscegenation to reproduce their social relations; their relations are, in fact, this very reproduction.”¹⁴⁴ It is important to understand white supremacy and antiblackness as a matter of *social relations* that reproduce themselves. The political ontology of race showcases this centrally; for ‘race’ emerges in/as the social relations constituting sociopolitical life.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 39-40.

¹⁴² Ibid, 40.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 25.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, emphasis mine.

Sexton recognizes the difficulties in the attempt to articulate something outside the bounds of racial sense-making, but this is the only way in which a transformation at the level of worlds can, or will, take place. He admits, “we are in a difficult theoretical position because ‘miscegenation,’ as we think of it now—as the mixture of pre-constituted races, however mythical — is only intelligible from the perspective of a racist culture in which anti-miscegenation is always already a component.”¹⁴⁵ We cannot go ‘looking for’ the event of miscegenation, then, in “what happens before, beyond, beneath, or in-between the meaningful categories of interracial sex or multiracial identity”¹⁴⁶: This ‘looking for’ what lies behind ‘miscegenation’ *through the lens offered by categories like ‘interracial sex’ or ‘multiraciality’* is a *symptom* of a system built on maintaining itself through this renewed (renewable) problematic. For, if these categories are structural mechanisms of sustaining the current sociopolitical order, then what is required is a deeper probe into the ways these categories appear to cohere, make sense, consolidate. Admittedly, then, ‘the event of miscegenation’ is unclear in the sense that it does not pick out an empirical phenomenon or something that can be ‘represented’ beyond a loose vision of what conditions (by way of occlusion) the continuation of social relations. However, it is offered in the spirit of ‘capturing’ a different metric for understanding and for racial sense-making. It helps *reorient* focus to the mechanisms that produce and reproduce oppression(s). And in this way, it helps develop a different frame through which to understand racial history and its uses.

Sexton’s theoretical reversal is helpful in bringing about the political-epistemological conditions for the institution of more liberatory patterns of belonging. His recasting of ‘racial mixture,’ ‘mixed race/multiraciality,’ and ‘miscegenation’ as well as his offering of “miscegenation as event” is clarifying in the sense that it both better *diagnoses* the problem and

¹⁴⁵ Sexton (2003), 264.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

reconceives/reorients us to the task at hand. What interests Sexton, and me, is developing ways to alter the political-conceptual ground that grants support to the persistence of oppressive patterns of relation. It shifts questions from the empirical history of ‘sex across the color line’ or ‘mixed race people’ and attends to the ways in which these phrases do not and cannot hold together in any coherent sense—what it means to *be* mixed race or *engage* in interracial sexuality is continually frustrated by the fact that there is nothing to grasp on to behind the political instantiation of these terms of analysis. There is not a ‘thing’ such as ‘mixed race people’ or an ‘act’ such as ‘sex across the color line’ *prior* to its representation in a grid of white supremacist political ontology. As discussed in this dissertation’s introduction, attempts to explain what is meant by ‘mixed race’ are constantly foiled—does it correspond to ancestry and if so, how far back? Does it pertain to phenotype and if so, how do we account for phenotypic changes throughout history? Is it meant to suggest ‘first generation mixture’ and if so, does this not flatten any previous ‘mixture’ by retroactively monoracializing populations? So, instead of proceeding with these figures—‘mixed race,’ ‘multiraciality,’ ‘interracial relationship’—as if they cohere and stand against/offer a challenge to a racial (racist) system that on the surface disavows them, “the position of the multiracial” needs to risk “being undone” and “losing itself in the struggle”; Otherwise, it will continue to be “accommodated by white supremacy” in its refusal to “break from the assumptive logic of anti-miscegenation.”¹⁴⁷ This is, as Sexton writes, “a battle within the bounds of a strategic field.”¹⁴⁸ Apprehending that fact and beginning to unravel parts of this conceptual field is key for the movement of liberatory politics.

As expressed, my goal has not principally been to recoup past histories via inclusion into a broadening archive detailing what mixed race *is*. I sought instead a historical retelling that is

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 265.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

primarily illustrative for our present moment—one in which we might look to the past as parallel, as a helpful interlocutor. For if, in the opening of this chapter as Nyong'o seems to suggest, the Great Multiracial Hope is nothing new but one instantiation of a reigning national-racial fantasy that upholds the structures of race, nation, sexuality, and gender in the U.S., then we need to consider the insights that can be gleaned by approaching race outside assumptive logics and its positioning as historically static, with typical divisions of past and present, regressive and progressive. In so doing, the ultimate goal of this project is to develop an approach to 'mixed race' and related terms that is generative rather than descriptive, since as I argue, part of the perniciousness of race *is* its activity as continually attempting to provide definition and delineation such that we concede too much to logics of oppression if we do the same. I hope to have provoked at least the beginnings of a transformation in thinking about race and mixed race through the framework of a political ontology of race that takes seriously the ongoing patterns of relation instantiated by white supremacy. This may have appeared entirely critical (in opposition to a generative account) and determining, but the purpose here has been to clear the path for any liberatory notion of mixed race, if there is one (and I will defend some potential possibilities in the latter half of the dissertation). I understand this work of critical excavation as simultaneously a process of building—building new senses, concepts, realities, etc. This simultaneity of excavation and construction should be understood as a method of path clearing such that other things come into view. If we have 'swept away' ideas about a putative 'mixed race' as signifying a person, group of people, or singular identity, or emergent form a certain 'act' of 'inter'-racial liaison, then we have to 'see' the field of liberatory thought and politics in regards to mixed race very differently. This is why in the next chapter I turn to the notion of social identity, arguing that if

'identity' is to play a role in liberatory politics, we will need to understand it quite differently, as primarily generative rather than descriptive.

Chapter 2
(Mixed Race) Identity and Intersectionality: On the Generativity of Identity for
Liberatory Thought and Politics

Given increasing attention to diversity, multiculturalism, and cosmopolitan world features in the last thirty plus years, it might appear that ‘mixed race’ is a quintessential progressive identity to embrace. It signals a fluidity, heterogeneity, and complexity that mirror many scholarly and popular approaches to identity today.¹⁴⁹ As a ‘new’ and celebrated designation, ‘mixed race’ has been used in myriad ways since the inauguration of the late 20th century mixed race/multiracial movement and is still very much a term in the making. Because of this, it is imperative that we think conceptually about its relation to liberatory thought and politics. Is it an identity term that ought to be embraced alongside other progressive ideals, or might we need to challenge some founding assumptions about mixed race identity in order to seek more liberatory aims? Scholars have done much to critique the ways in which a simplistic appeal to mixed race can reproduce harms of oppression. For instance, as David Parker and Miri Song write in the Introduction to *Rethinking Mixed Race*,

If the notion of ‘mixed race’ undercuts attempts to identify and perpetuate stable racially defined collectivities, then how can ‘mixed race’ itself be a sustainable category? Is it not simply reinscribing people within racialised boundaries, admittedly less fixed than before, but still there?¹⁵⁰

Advancing more than curiosity about this situation, David Theo Goldberg questions the political efficacy of the project of mixed race identification, stating: “The challenge to the project of racial

¹⁴⁹ We might think here of discourses on creolization, performativity, hybridity, nomadism, assemblage, intersectionality and interstitiality. While these discourses cannot and should not be collapsed, I list them here as aligned with the breakdown of identities understood as rigid, stratified, distinct, and homogenous classes of people.

¹⁵⁰ David Parker and Miri Song. (2001). *Rethinking 'Mixed Race'*. Pluto Press: London, UK, 11.

purity in the celebration of mixed-race identities is at best ambiguous, (re) fixing the premises of the racialising project in a place as it challenges that project's very terms of articulation."¹⁵¹

A guiding theoretical question over the past thirty years has thus been precisely this: Can 'mixed race' identity be liberatory and if so, how? Within the field of philosophy, the debate has manifest in the polarized positions of Naomi Zack and Lewis Gordon. Zack, as we saw in the last chapter, has been a proponent of mixed race identity since her 1992 work *Race and Mixed Race*. She advocates for a distinct category of 'mixed race' as a way to challenge what she describes as the unfair, unjust, and illogical racial kinship schema in the U.S. Writing in part in response to Zack, Gordon's 1995 article "Critical 'Mixed Race'" argues for the impossibility of a critical mixed race position within an antiblack racist world, wherein the "two dominant principles of racist ideology" include "(1) be white, but above all (2) don't be black."¹⁵² As Gordon argues, there is no way for a mixed race position to counter the second principle given its distinction from the identity position *of* black, and so there can be no 'critical' stand-alone mixed race position. Other philosophers, such as Linda Alcoff and Ronald Sundstrom, writing in the mid-2000s have offered alternatives to the poles of the debate as structured by Zack and Gordon, offering a qualified mixed race identity position that aims to challenge patterns of antiblackness, reification, naïve celebration, and specifically what they refer to as the "black-white binary" (BwB). Sundstrom advocates for an ontology of mixed race identity that "make[s] sense and [is] not delusional" given what he calls a "metaphysical pluralist ontology of race."¹⁵³ Mixed race identity is real to a certain degree for Sundstrom, given the combination of social forces that have made it so. As he writes,

For a social category, such as race or mixed race, to be a real social kind at some site, given metaphysical pluralism, what has to be present are social forces— labels, institutions, individual intentions, laws, mores, values, traditions—combined in a dynamic with enough

¹⁵¹ David Theo Goldberg. (1997). *Racial Subjects: Writing on Race in America*. Psychology Press: London, UK.

¹⁵² Lewis Gordon. (1995). "Critical 'Mixed Race.'" *Social Identities*. 1.2, 9

¹⁵³ Ronald Sundstrom. (2001). "Being and Being Mixed Race." *Social Theory and Practice*. 27.2, 293-294

strength to give the category presence and impact at that site.¹⁵⁴

This is the case for mixed race identity in the U.S., Sundstrom suggests; mixed race identity is real as a human social kind though it is not as real as “Asian, Hispanic, black. Native American, and white are” at this time. The political question, then, for Sundstrom, is how to increase this degree of reality of mixed race without being complicit in racist hierarchy. Alcoff shares this worry, yet advocates for a reconstruction of mixed race identity that is “positive (in the sense of substantive).”¹⁵⁵ She suggests a “combinatory identity” for mixed race identity in the U.S. that would recognize the specificities of particular ‘mixes’ so one would not be neutrally ‘mixed’ but specifically “Latino/white, African American/Asian American, and so on.” This, she argues, is the “most accurate characterization for many mixed persons in the North today.”¹⁵⁶

While the positions of Zack, Gordon, Sundstrom, and Alcoff are significantly different, each of these authors set out to answer the question of identity and liberatory politics by assuming ‘mixed race,’ to be a distinct identity. The terms of the debate necessitate that one either argue *for* the importance of naming mixed race or against. Gordon makes the strong claim *against* this naming by describing how the “question of mixed race people being an ‘other’ race”¹⁵⁷ is only

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 295.

¹⁵⁵ Linda Martín Alcoff. (2006). *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*. Oxford University Press: New York, NY, 280.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 283.

Alcoff does interestingly suggest that this way of understanding ‘mixed race’ would not seek to be an entirely new category, yet in advocating for this combinatory approach, her articulation of mixed race is open to the pluralization of a multitude of mixed hyphen-ized categories, so while she is not advocating for *one* mixed race category, she does assume categories of mixedness that will be understood as distinct mixed identities. Alcoff’s position is perhaps nearest to the account I wish to give in my assessment of ‘mixed race identity’ because it shares in the expressed need and desire to challenge our conceptions of identity by “transform[ing] our current interpretations and understandings of them,” rather than simply casting them off wholesale. And yet, Alcoff’s more broader claim about identity is that it is an embodied, hermeneutic *site*. That is, identities are both embodied, phenomenological social locations as well as “hermeneutic horizons comprised of experiences, basic beliefs, and communal values” that orient, but do not fully determine one in their experience with the world.¹⁵⁶ It is this ultimate reliance on identity as a ‘site’ that I am critical of as evidence later in the chapter through exploration of accounts of identity from heterodox readers of intersectionality.

¹⁵⁷ Gordon (1995), 9

meaningful in a racial conceptual schema structured by antiblack racism where there is an injunction, above all, against being black. As he concludes, “the ‘other’ race argument is really about not being black.”¹⁵⁸ On the other side of the debate are Zack, Alcoff, and Sundstrom, who all answer, in various ways and to various degrees, *affirmatively*, suggesting that mixed race, as a distinct identity, has a role to play in liberatory politics. Zack is perhaps most direct and upfront about this, doubling down on her early 1990’s claims in *Race and Mixed Race* by stating in 2010 that she had “hoped to see” greater recognition of mixed race as “a distinct or stand-alone racial category.”¹⁵⁹ Sundstrom and Alcoff each advocate a qualified understanding of mixed race identity and its relation to liberatory politics. What I mean by this is that they both claim that mixed race is something that *ought* to be named and the concern is articulating *how* and *why*.

Sundstrom and Alcoff, along with Zack, each imply the importance of ‘accuracy’ in defining racial identities, and by extension, ‘mixed race’ identity. As Alcoff states, “It is important to move beyond the black–white binary of race for reasons of descriptive accuracy of our current social realities”¹⁶⁰ while Sundstrom, in speaking of the hope of the ‘browning of America,’ describes the nation’s racial and ethnic categories as “anachronistic and deeply inaccurate.”¹⁶¹ And, as Zack states, in describing how “many black and white mixed-race Americans” wonder if the one drop rule should be supported, describes how doing so would be “at the expense of more accurate description and record keeping.”¹⁶² These three authors each imply, to varying degrees and in different ways, the importance of a pluralization of racial categories, particularly beyond ‘black’ and ‘white,’ for purposes of correcting current inaccuracies. They assume that the addition

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 9-10

¹⁵⁹ Naomi Zack. (2010). “The Fluid Symbol of Mixed Race.” *Hypatia*. 25.4, 876

¹⁶⁰ Linda Martin Alcoff. (2009). “Latinos Beyond the Binary.” *Southern Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. XLVII, 117.

¹⁶¹ Ronald R. Sundstrom. (2008). *The Browning of America and the Evasion of Social Justice*. State University of New York Press: New York, NY, 1.

¹⁶² Naomi Zack. (1995). “Mixed Black and White Race and Public Policy.” *Hypatia*. 10.1, 127.

of racial categories, specifically those such as ‘mixed race’ will help to better reflect our racial social world, which will in turn provide more clarity in challenging oppression. As Alcoff suggests, “identity proliferation” can help achieve “more descriptive accuracy, predictive capacity, and thus political efficacy.”¹⁶³ Alcoff most directly advocates for additional racial categories for purposes of descriptive accuracy but Sundstrom and Zack each implicitly assume that descriptive accuracy is, in part, a result of naming and claiming mixed race identity.

In providing this brief gloss on Gordon’s, Zack’s, Sundstrom’s, and Alcoff’s positions I want to make the general claim that they are all responding to the question of the role of mixed race identity in liberatory politics through a frame that assumes mixed race identity to be a matter of distinguishing a racial category that can describe a specific grouping of people that are important to recognize for matters of a liberatory racial politic. Whether or not these authors understand mixed race to be particularly promising as a liberatory identity, they all begin their analysis assuming mixed race identity to follow a certain logic, that is, one based in/as a description of a meaningful social category existent in the world. The shared pole of assumption is that if mixed race is going to be meaningful it will be through elaboration of an embraceable term of identity, one that challenges past classificatory schemas and more adequately and accurately names individuals, advancing racial justice and liberatory politics in this way.

The claim about increasing ‘accuracy’ through mixed race identification is often set against the backdrop of a history of race in the U.S. understood *as the history of the one drop rule*. If the one drop rule exhausts racial history in the U.S. and if race could somehow be more neutrally named (outside sociopolitical structures that brought it into being), then our history would seem to have occluded a variety of potential racial designations that could more adequately describe people

¹⁶³ Alcoff (2009), 124

racially and attend to matters of racial injustice. Yet, as I described in the last chapter, we need to understand a more complex racial history in the U.S. that includes a variety of instances wherein mixedness was explicitly named or the fluidity and instability of race was recognized. Additionally, in a more robust racial history of the U.S., mixedness operates centrally as a conceptual vehicle for patterns of racial domination. If this is the case, it is unclear how descriptive accuracy itself is important to a liberatory politics seeking an end to white supremacy. From its inception, white supremacy has been invested in naming practices under the auspices of accuracy. As mentioned previously, Thomas Jefferson went through excruciating detail articulating how the interplay of blood quantum and one's status as free/unfree generated one's racial status, as an emancipated slave might be reclassified as 'white' if they had only one eighth of 'black blood.'¹⁶⁴ Or consider the multitude of court cases at the turn of the 20th whose goal it was to determine, with the implicit aim of correctly identifying, who was a 'white man' so that one could determine who could become a naturalized citizen.¹⁶⁵ I argued in the previous chapter that race in the U.S. isn't just a matter of a (faulty) classification schema, but the continued investment *in* attempting to determine a system of categorization itself. And so, my concern with attention to 'accuracy' is that it offers very little to liberatory politics if the challenge ought to be against the desire and intent to name, categorize, and organize people according to a particular racial schema that is intent on 'getting it right,' and this includes approaches to race today that aim to counter racial injustice with a different set of naming practices that is 'more correct' or 'more accurate.'

In this chapter, I propose a different reading of mixed race 'identity' and liberatory politics by attending to the conceptual structure of identity. I argue that we ought to focus on altering the

¹⁶⁴ Robert Bernasconi. (2012). "Crossed Lines in the Racialization Process: Race as a Border Concept." *Research in Phenomenology* 42: 206-228.

¹⁶⁵ Natalia Molina. (2014). *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*. University of California Press: Berkeley, CA.

conceptual structure that underlies our identifying practices rather than the racial names we ascribe to ourselves and one another in an ongoing historical order of white supremacy. The impulse to name and claim designations within this order is, at best, unhelpful, and at worst, harmfully consistent with patterns of racial domination structuring the history of race in the U.S. How we think of identity seems to necessitate the shared pole of analysis through which Gordon, Zack, Sundstrom, and Alcoff offer their assessments. Instead of following one or another scholar in addressing the political import of mixed race identity, I offer a different entrance into the question of the relation between liberatory politics and mixed race identity by arguing that we ought to understand how the conceptual structure of identity operates and can be transformed given attention to the political ontology of race as I outlined in the prior chapter. We assume too much in thinking ‘mixed race’ (or really any social identity category) can/does correspond to something ‘in the world’ that is distinct and can be sorted ‘accurately’. Social identities are expressly *political* and as such, direct us towards understanding ongoing *sets of patterns of relations*, rather than groups in need of representation via logics that effect distinctions.

In exploring the relation between mixed race identity and liberatory politics through a reassessment of the conceptual structure of ‘identity,’ I propose that *if* the language of mixed race identity is to have any positive relation to liberatory politics, we will need to understand the function of identity very differently. We will need to understand identity outside any relation to “categorical logics,” understandings of identities as distinct, separable, fixed, or as I’ll go on to argue, as a site or location, however dynamically constituted. I take ‘intersectionality’ as my entry point into discussions of liberatory approaches to identity. I do so not because I think intersectionality offers a particular theory of identity suitable to liberatory politics. Instead, I put the legacies and present status of intersectionality in conversation with ‘mixed race’ in order to

show what is at stake in understanding identity via liberatory thought/practice. In what follows, I argue that we should understand the relation between intersectionality and mixed race identity as one in which 1) intersectionality provides not a representational theory of identity wherein mixed race is a quintessential example, but an analysis of what is missing and *how* it is missing from standard depictions of social identity so that 2), mixed race identity, understood through the lens of intersectionality-reconceived points to a conceptual *gap* at the site of ‘mixed race,’ one that cannot (and should not) be filled by representation of intersecting lineages or traditional/‘mono’ ‘races.’ Instead, this gap ought to illuminate patterns of relation or potential relation that challenge intersecting oppressions forming the problem of invisibility and the goal of representation in the first place.

After situating intersectionality as that which makes space for (but doesn’t itself provide) liberatory conceptions of identity, I argue that mixed race identity must attend to the import of intersectionality in its resistance to modes of categorialization and representationalism.

I. The Language of ‘Mixed Race’ in the Contemporary U.S.

Colloquially, mixed race identity in the contemporary U.S. seems to signal one of two options by way of its conceptual structure. For one, mixed race can signal a pluralization or multiplication of race at the site of the individual. This proceeds by way of an additive logic wherein an individual might describe themselves as Asian and white and [thus] ‘mixed’ or black and white and [thus] mixed. In this formulation, one describes themselves as mixed *and*. This would be akin to how Alcoff describes mixed race in the U.S. via a ‘combinatory’ logic. This conjunctive logic, as I’m describing it, differs from an understanding of mixed race as a stand-

alone category of identity and this is the second way in which a mixed race identity is expressed. Instead of ‘mixed race’ being used alongside other racial designators to point out specific elements that ‘add up’ to a ‘mixed’ designation, mixed race has also been used fairly consistently as a separate and stand-alone category, such that one is, for example, mixed, *not* black. This is what actor Taye Diggs seems to suggest in his 2015 comments about the identity of his son with actress/singer Idina Menzel. He describes his worries about others being ‘confused’ about his son’s biracial heritage if his son does not identify as ‘mixed’ *instead of* ‘black’ and states, “When we [call biracial kids black] you risk disrespecting that one half of who you are and that’s my fear.”¹⁶⁶

While these appeals to mixed race identity in common parlance—the conjunctive and singular—are significantly different, they both operate according to an assumption that race is primarily about representation and classificatory schemas—whether that is in terms of listing off racial designators that apply to an individual or choosing an overarching designation that itself encapsulates all it is meant to represent. Both understand racial designations to attach to persons in a way that ‘makes sense’ or says something important about *who they are*; in this way, ‘mixed’ acts primarily in a descriptive fashion. This is, of course, how most social identifications operate—the goal of identity and identification does seem to be to say something meaningful about what or who someone is. Yet, understood through the frame of a political ontology of race, as I began articulating in the previous chapter, we ought to complicate this understanding of identity. As I will understand ‘identity’ here, I narrow it to social and political signifiers for human social groupings that name not simply a shared action or affiliation (for example, vegan as one who does not eat meat or dairy or democrat, as one who affiliates with the democratic political party, respectively), but that generates and is generative of human meaning making processes within a

¹⁶⁶ Evelyn Diaz. (2015). “Taye Diggs Fears People Will See His Son as Black.” *BET*. From <https://www.bet.com/news/celebrities/2015/11/18/taye-diggs-fears-people-will-see-his-son-as-black.html>

particular historical-social order granting status, protection, and material resources based off these ‘identity’ distinctions. Identities are that which provide a distribution of vulnerabilities across various registers—social, political, legal, etc.

As might now be apparent, I am not considering ‘social identities’ as ‘mere social constructs’ that can be logically discounted and shown to be ‘incorrect.’ I also am not considering social identities through the frame of self-identification, though we do and must ‘self-identify’ in a social order intent on allocating meaning and meaningful resources through the elaboration of terms of identity. At the level at which I am concerned, social identities exceed our abilities to reject or embrace these terms once and for all. My discussion of identity will pertain to categories such as race, gender, and sexuality as existential identifications that we cannot escape but that we must continually grapple with, as they are an effect of a particular historical-conceptual order. I will suggest one way to grapple with them—through a reformed conceptual structure informing our thinking and use of identity. Understood through the frame of political ontology, identity is not about who one is but about asking: what is the relational system of meaning within which I am caught? One can surely make claims *within* a system of meaning, as we do and must, that describes ‘who one is,’ in order to make social and political gains that provide for material or social survival and a less violent way of persisting in the present, but we need to be clear that these are made through use of a particular, historical mode of sense-making, which, as I have described, runs deep.

My goal in offering a different conceptual structure of identity is advanced through attention to a political ontology of race wherein the challenge we must pose is to the *logic* we use to identify because it is a particularly violent logic that undergirds our current schema. We need to talk about identity as it is entangled within political ontology. Through this lens, we recognize the institution of a historical order that necessitates and grants meaning *through the appearance* of

given categories of belonging and this practice is proliferated for the purposes of upholding racial domination. Instead of analyzing specific identity categories, then, my goal is to understand the terms by which identity is proffered within *political relation*. My goal is thus not to advocate for the further proliferation or elaboration of identities, such as mixed race, as having liberatory potential, even within its potential to account for certain criteria such that it rejects participating in the reproduction of oppressions such as antiblackness. Rather, we need to think about how terms of identity are positioned and mobilized in a specific order and how we are recapitulating *this order* in the very moment we are deploying them as distinct descriptors of groups or individuals. I am working against scholarly impulses that suggest that so long as we mean the right things when we declare our identities, or so long as we mold our identities into celebratory, just, and inclusive sites of belonging, we will have constituted a liberatory practice. In our political ontology, identity, as it stands, is not a liberatory locus—the conditions of sense of the system continually deradicalizes this practice of naming, making it a position we must attach to the individual, one that is supposed to say something important and ‘once and for all’ about them. This happens often with coming out narratives. Take for example music artist Frank Ocean, who in 2012, posted to tumblr a beautiful essay about his first love, a man.¹⁶⁷ Though he never claimed a queerness of any sort, headlines read the next day that he came out as gay. The terms of identification within our political ontology follow a logic where they are thought to attach to or inhere in a person or peoples based on satisfying a delimited range of characteristics. Ocean now ‘was’ gay; he ‘had’ a sexuality. Instead of thinking about his identity as a matter of articulating a certain relationship to patriarchy or heteronormativity, the dominant mode of analysis tends to assume identity as capturing something about an individual that can be meaningfully described outside of a political schema

¹⁶⁷ Frank Ocean. (2012). “Untitled.” *Tumblr*. From <http://frankocean.tumblr.com/post/26473798723>

that demands identity follow this logic.

My goal is to analyze or grasp what constitutes the field of politics; what is considered possible in the political arena via identity if we're saturated in a schema that demands identity to be a matter of having or being 'x'? And what might be possible if we reject that schema itself? Rather than embracing or rejecting identity, or embracing or rejecting mixed race identity in particular, we ought to begin at a level wherein we seek to understand the mechanisms that produce a certain mode of sense making conditioning identity. We must seek the end of the world of sense that makes it appear that naming and claiming identities as a matter of having or being, or as locations/positions/sites is the only locus through which liberatory action can be engaged when it comes to identity. My claim is that beginning from the premise of a political ontology of race, we are granted a different starting point and thus different questions that can generate a different understanding of what identity is, or more precisely *that* it is. It provides an opening for understanding identities not as given but as the effects of sets of patterns of relations instituted by a certain political ontology, as the distinctions that then inform patterns of belonging and relating in an oppressive social order. The goal must be to affect a mode of sense that produces different patterns of relations. This includes affecting a different mode of sense-making for understanding identity. The liberatory import of identity will come through a challenge to the political sense-making mandate to name and embrace distinctions as a particular site or social location, and instead begin to articulate identity as a matter of relation itself. If this is the case, we need to think about what would constitute a liberatory conceptual structure of identity such that our mode of political sense-making is radically altered. I wish to retain the language of 'identity' because our current oppressive order is not due to 'identities' themselves, but to relations of force that go obscured in a historical-conceptual schema that proffers identities through the appearance of a 'given,' as

something that is readily apparent or can be captured or ‘gotten right’ through further description. But if identity no longer operates according to this imperative, what might we find? What new ways of relating and sense-making might emerge?

‘Mixed race’ identity contemporarily is often advanced as capturing the ‘reality’ of multiple cultural, historical, geographical, and hereditary lineages that are thought to ‘intersect’ at the site of the mixed race person or the generation of a mixed race population. The goal has been to make this apparent—to name and celebrate it—given a history of suppression, a history in which ‘mixed race’ was denied or presented as a ‘lack.’ As I wish to argue, however, before attempting to ‘fix’ an obscured or inaccurate representation of racial reality via the importation of ‘mixed race,’ we ought to question what motivates this appearance of a gap and the impetus to fill it. In recent decades, the concept of intersectionality has been indispensable for understanding the mechanisms at work in the problematic relationship between categories of identity and social and political ‘justice.’ Advanced as a theoretical term in relation to the legal field—specifically within antidiscrimination law—Kimberlé Crenshaw provided intersectionality, I argue, as a concept that illuminated the ways in which produced within our political ontology of race is a logic of ‘identity’ that makes invisible those who are multiply-oppressed. By generating cultural legibility and intelligibility by way of separable, exclusive categories of belonging (in Crenshaw’s example, ‘race’ and ‘gender’), the conceptual schema of our historical-social order produces a conceptual *gap* wherein we cannot ‘see’ the person or group at the site wherein oppressions ‘intersect’ and in this way, we cannot fully see, perceive, or understand even the *need* for redress, thus obscuring *ways* to go about redress. On my reading, intersectionality helps provide a different way to figure the role of ‘mixed race identity’ in liberatory politics—one that does not seek at base a description or elaboration of what mixed race *is* and who, why, or how one should ‘have’ or ‘be’ (or not have

or be) mixed race.

In approaching the question of mixed race identity from the perspective of a political ontology of race in the U.S., we might ask: what are the conditions that inform a sociopolitical schema in which mixed race identity appears available or legible as that which better names and describes a person or population so that a liberatory politic can be advanced? What I refer to as ‘heterodox intersectionality’—as advanced, oddly enough, by the coiner of the term, Kimberlé Crenshaw, as well as others such as Maria Lugones, Vivian May, and Anna Carastathis—helps us answer this question while also providing the impetus to think differently about the logic informing our political schema.

I suggest that heterodox intersectionality allows us to think about identity and mixedness more generatively, as expressing patterns of relation or potential relation rather than a definitive site. With this in mind, we might then seek alternative forms of relating and belonging. My claim is that we cannot start from descriptive practices of identity in order to generate different modes of political belonging since the impetus to name identities in this way follows the logic of our current schema; rather, we ought to understand identity *as political relations* that we must transform via an understanding of how those relations have historically produced the imperative *to name* a particular site via a descriptive modality, thus seeking an elaboration of identity and mixedness outside this imperative.

In what follows, I take the case of ‘mixed race’ identity and put it in conversation with intersectionality, which has now become a, if not *the* paradigmatic liberatory approach to thinking about identity, power, resistance, and the depths of sociopolitical formation. I describe what I find to be the relationship between ‘mixed race’ and intersectionality and the potentials for liberatory thought and practice emergent from their interplay. In challenging categorial logics of identity by

showing the violences and irreparable occlusions produced in its mode of sense-making, intersectionality provides the impetus for thinking mixed race and other social identities beyond the logics of representation.

II. The Import of Intersectionality for the Generativity of (Mixed) Identity

In the introduction to David Parker's and Miri Song's anthology *Rethinking 'Mixed Race,'* the authors comment on the relation between intersectionality as an emerging paradigm for understanding the complexity of identity and 'mixed race' identity. They describe 'intersectionality' as "the idea that identity politics takes place at the site where multiple categories intersect" and claim that 'mixed race' would *seem* a paradigmatic case of intersectionality given its mixture/incorporation of multiple racial backgrounds.¹⁶⁸ Yet, Parker and Song conclude that because "intersectionality can imply that social identities arise from social relations meeting at a single point, with a resolution at that site" it is "too static a rendition of the interactions between multiple histories, images and transnational networks" of which mixed race is comprised.¹⁶⁹ Parker and Song, as I wish to argue, are both right and wrong. What they get wrong is the assumption of intersectionality as offering an understanding of identity as the *site* where a multitude of relations meet. What they get right is the impetus to think mixed race identity outside descriptions of a particular site, however complexly defined. In my understanding of intersectionality, inspired by the heterodox readings of Crenshaw, May, Lugones, and Carastathis, intersectionality provides the impetus for thinking mixed race identity more generatively—as

¹⁶⁸ Parker and Song. (2001). "Introduction." *Rethinking Mixed Race*. Ed. By David Parker and Miri Song. Pluto Press: London, UK, 15.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

political relations, inspired by and furthered within this historical social order, though not reduced to it. The political relations made invisible by heterodox intersectionality points to the impossible-to-fill gap *as well as* the dominant imperative to fill it that is produced by our dominant sociopolitical conceptual schema. From this position, we can both reject the formation of the gap and reject the imperative for it to be filled. We can instead, as I argue, understand the conceptual structure of identity radically different in order to allow different sociopolitical relations to form.

As stated, I reject Parker and Song's formulation of intersectionality as a theory of identity that maps a static *site* where identities reside while accepting their claim that mixed race identity (and identity in general) needs to be understood radically differently. My positive project thus includes an elaboration of heterodox intersectionality as a frame through which to think about mixed race identity in ways that engages in a liberatory politic that aims to challenge, in the deepest way possible, the groundings of our oppressive social order.

In following heterodox readers in this formulation of intersectionality, I contest what have become dominant appraisals of intersectionality as a theory of identity, evidenced in Parker's and Song's reductivist articulation above. Not only do I wish to contest an understanding of intersectionality as representing a static sense of identity, but I caution against understanding intersectionality as offering a theory of identity at all, if the task of identity here is thought of as one of representation. In my reading and for my purposes, intersectionality is significant *primarily because* it does not purport to offer a representationalist theory of identity and this is particularly helpful for the moment in which we find ourselves in regards to 'mixed race identity' in the U.S., where it is continually proffered as an identity that can better represent or more accurately describe racial 'reality.' In what follows, I offer a brief re-situating of intersectionality for the purposes of conceptualizing identity. I claim that intersectionality itself does not give us an account of identity,

but rather provides a diagnosis of what is necessary and at stake in developing (liberatory) notions of identity.

a. The Import of Intersectionality

It has been nearly thirty years since the inception of Kimberlé Crenshaw's work on intersectionality.¹⁷⁰ Since this time, 'intersectionality' has been taken up as a theory, method, and paradigm for understanding oppression(s), social identity, and institutions of power and has essentially morphed into a field of its own. Roderick Ferguson describes two main research trends in this field, which he calls the dominant affirmation and the dominant objection. While the former accepts intersectionality as an "an occasion for a positivism," granting knowledge that, "via an assemblage of social relations,...can be observed as empirical truths."¹⁷¹ The dominant objection rejects intersectionality because it is understood as "as preserv[ing] ideologies of discreteness, identity politics, and so forth."¹⁷² Both, Ferguson argues, are problematically invested in a "will to truth" and a belief that, as a signifier, intersectionality is aimed at discreteness and definitiveness. If the dominant affirmation and objection exhaust the field of intersectionality, it appears we have reached a serious impasse since both assume that *if* intersectionality has anything to say about identity, it is by way of an additive logic that maintains the existence of stand-alone categories.¹⁷³ Yet, I wish to follow heterodox readers in reframing the relationship between intersectionality and

¹⁷⁰ Kimberlé Crenshaw. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum*. Issue 1; Kimberlé Crenshaw. (1991). "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and the Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review*. 43.6

¹⁷¹Roderick A. Ferguson. (2012). "Reading Intersectionality." *Trans-Scripts*. 2, 91.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ I am seeking ways to exceed the binary of the dominant affirmation and dominant objection to intersectionality expressed by Ferguson, which, on the question of identity, map generally on to the post-positivist embrace of identity politics and the post-structuralist/post-modern rejections of identity, respectively.

identity such that, as I will go on to claim, the import of intersectionality lies in its ability to uncover and make visible the conceptual stakes of the matter, not necessarily a better conception of ‘identity’ itself. In so doing, it better situates us in relation to the task of liberatory thought/politics related to identity.

Crenshaw’s early essays on intersectionality point primarily to an *invisibility* or a *gap* produced by current legal antidiscrimination remedies in their focus on either black *men* or *white* women, which makes *invisible* the qualitative difference of black women’s experiences.¹⁷⁴ This, she contends, ought to lead us to consider the *inability* of achieving racial and gender justice given the way our current categorial social markers are conceived and deployed. The main takeaway is this: the qualitative difference of black women’s experiences cannot be articulated within the conceptual schema informing this problem of invisibility in the first place.

While Crenshaw’s analysis is on the concrete experience of black women in the legal system, it has conceptual reverberations for marginalized identities more generally. Intersectionality showcases the functioning of oppressive logics (in this case, within the legal system) as they employ categorial separability to produce a site of invisibility and unknowability that cannot be remedied via the system informing it.

While Crenshaw figures ‘race’ and ‘gender’ as the level at which categorial separation is imposed such that *black women* remain unseen, the allegory to mixed race would appear to be advanced as such: Race has historically been about the exclusive separation of categories like black, white, Asian, Latino/a, which makes the ‘intersection’ or the mixing of these categories unintelligible as a racial identity itself, and so the goal with intersectionality ought to be to make visible mixed race and recognize it as a viable experiential location or identity. But the point with

¹⁷⁴ Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991).

heterodox intersectionality is two-fold. Not only does it point to how dominant forms of categorial sense making produces certain occlusions, but that the goal cannot be to *overcome* those occlusions because the logic informing them generate not only the invisibility but the *inability* to overcome them through the same representationalist logic. The goal instead must be to overcome the modes of sense that produce the appearance of these occlusions in the first place.

Crenshaw's initial critique goes much deeper than identifying a gap and overcoming it through a description of the social location currently 'missing.'¹⁷⁵ If what is missing cannot be fully apprehended given current political-epistemological schema and indeed, if this schema has a vested interest in *obscuring* the possibility of apprehension, then what is required is an entirely new logic, one that avoids categorial separability by making the demand for categorial identification nonsensical. If our language and ways of knowing/understanding are so structured by categorial logics, it will take nothing short of such transformation.

The history of 'race' is not just a history of racial classification gone awry, but about the political deployment of categorial separation. It is about building conceptual mechanisms that produce an appearance of various, distinct, groupings. Oftentimes, mixed race is presented as what goes obscured within a political-conceptual apparatus that deploys such separation. 'Mixed race' is supposed to be the answer to a history of suppression of racial identities and groupings, but my claim is that it names an 'intersection' that *can't* be filled via the same logic informing the 'gap' in the first place. The *imperative* to name races as distinct groupings is the logic that both mandates racial distinctions such as black, white, Asian, Latino/a, etc. *and* 'mixed race' as the name the bridging or overcoming of these distinctions. Heterodox intersectionality shows us that the logics

¹⁷⁵ Hortense Spillers describes this as a "mythic prepossession"; black women are both "marked" but unknown within dominant forms of intelligibility. It is within a current historical order, a particular material and symbolic economy that the subject positions of those multiply-burdened by oppression(s) "resist telling" and so *cannot be told* within the schema informing them in the first place.

informing the supposed suppression of mixed race and its contemporary desire to be named are one in the same and that the political stakes of the matter require an awareness of the unfillable ‘gap’ of mixed race and a refusal to try and fill it through a substantive construction of identity as a site, however dynamically constituted. The aim of ‘recognizing’ mixed race identity has come in the form of reveling in its dynamism, fluidity, impurity, etc. but this recognition has still relied on description of something one is or has, rather than, as I suggest we might consider, a set of political relations. What I want to suggest, through an understanding of *heterodox* intersectionality, is that assumptions about categorial distinctions between races produces a space where the ‘intersection’ of those races is thought to produce a ‘mixed’ race, but this assumption corresponds to the same conceptual logic informing the distinction of ‘traditional’ races in the first place and is built on a desire to ‘fill’ a gap produced by a mode of sense structured by the desire *to* fill.

We need a way to see at once both the ‘gap’ (produced by categorial separation of races in the first instance) and the desire to fill the gap (produced within a broader politics that accepts race as actual, given, and existent such that it *can* be ‘accurately’ named). It is near impossible to see both together today because it appears as though our only recourse to mixed race identity within liberatory political action is to embrace or reject it as a description meant to accurately encompass a given person or group of people, rather than a mode of political relationality.

My claim is that identity terms emergent from our historical milieu, one informed by white supremacy, patriarchy, heterosexism, settler-coloniality, are *themselves* unable to contest the mechanisms granting them intelligibility. And so, as I wish to argue, the goal ought not to be to proliferate and make intelligible ‘new’ categories of belonging as if this was the end (or the beginning) of liberatory thought/politics. Mixed race identity is thus not in need of further recognition and representation; rather, the conceptual structure of *identity* requires further

exploration and explanation such that when we evoke the language of mixed race ‘identity’, we are aware (and provoke awareness) of the deeply political nature of the social identities we hold dear. What might it mean to use ‘mixedness’ in ‘against the grain’ ways, unsettling its hold as a descriptor offering recognition to an assumed constituency and allowing it to become otherwise, to travel in unanticipated directions and build conceptual linkages that might afford more liberatory patterns of relating and belonging?

As Vivian May describes it,

Intersectionality directs our attention to the ‘voids’ (Crenshaw 2011c) where silenced speech resides, focuses on the ‘residues’ (Schutte 2000) that do not translate, and calls for the need to presume the meaningfulness of an alternative idea or unfamiliar worldview (Babbitt 2001), even if one cannot understand it on conventional terms.¹⁷⁶

Instead of a conceptual gap that can be filled, the problem intersectionality makes clear is much more insidious, requiring social-epistemic and conceptual transformation of these signifiers themselves and the social-political field in which they are used. In the context of racial categories, then, identifying mixed race as the intersection of ‘traditional races’ does not address the problem of an oppressive conceptual system that stratifies and naturalizes ‘races’ in the first place. Intersectionality shows us that this conceptual gap—what we might even call the conceptual violence of oppression—cannot be filled simply by naming or building better or more ‘accurate’ descriptions of those thought to embody such designations. Instead, it requires nothing short of a radical reorientation of the conceptual structure of identity and concomitant understandings of the processes of justice and liberation. As Lugones puts it, “once intersectionality shows us what is missing, we have ahead of us the task of reconceptualizing the logic of the intersection.”¹⁷⁷ As she

¹⁷⁶ May, Vivian. (2015). *Pursuing Intersectionality: Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries*. Routledge: New York, NY, 187

¹⁷⁷ Maria Lugones. (2007). “Heterosexualism and the Modern Colonial Gender System.” *Hypatia* 22.1,193.

articulates it, this is for the goal of “avoid[ing] separability” of identity categories,”¹⁷⁸ which I explore in the next session, arguing that while the task is to develop an entirely new logic, we might still go further in challenging the notion that we can and should better represent identity rather than explore the relations it provokes and could provoke given oppressive and liberatory logics, respectively.

Overall, rather than a theory of identity that is understood as the final achievement of the feminist project, Carastathis, Crenshaw, May, and Lugones position intersectionality as a sensibility or disposition, calling forth that which it cannot yet name/describe. As a provisional concept, intersectionality seeks to disrupt status quo understandings of social categories as separable and exclusive. Carastathis proposes that we understand intersectionality as a generative or transformative impulse “that can help disorient our entrenched, naturalized cognitive habits,” suggesting a methodology to that end whose accomplishment is not intersectionality *as such*.¹⁷⁹ Rather, as a concept that illuminates the problem of invisibility and the *inability* of our dominant conceptual schema to confront this, it shows us *what is at stake* in building liberatory practices of identity/identifying: at base, a radically different conceptual, epistemological, ontological schema.

b. Against Categorical logics and Toward a Generativity of Mixed Race Identity

While Parker and Song are mistaken in their understanding of intersectionality, they are correct to stress the need for a notion of mixed identity that exceeds its depiction as a *site*, especially a static one. My argument is that intersectionality *provides* this demand rather than

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Anna Carastathis. (2016). *Intersectionality: Origins, Contestations, Horizons*. University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln, NE, 108.

forecloses it. Clearly, rendering static the sociohistorical interactions that condition the emergence of any social identity is misguided in its inadequate portrayal of the complex *process* of identity construction. This is perhaps *most* evident in the case of ‘mixed race identity,’ since, on the surface, it transparently invites and involves recognition of multiple elements and the combination of different qualities or varieties. It also carries with it a sense of ambivalence given the seeming incompatibility, inconsistency, and contrariness of the combined elements. Generally, then, racial mixedness seems apt to resist dominant and problematic understandings of identities that reduce or forego attention to history and political formation. Yet, as I have been arguing, it is not via the description of a given population that ‘mixed race’ will live up to these aims. As a more thorough account of history shows, ‘mixed race’ has been and remains conceptually necessary for ongoing formations of race in the U.S. Rather than an ‘identity,’ or ‘phenomena’ that has been suppressed (and thus in its release will be liberatory), we ought to more rightfully understand it as a pillar in the institution and maintenance of a certain historical order, which demands and supports oppressive patterns of relating and belonging. As Jared Sexton describes, historically, there is an

inverse historical relation between white supremacy’s tolerance for multiracial formations and the relative strength of black liberation struggle. When black resistance is thought by state and civil society to be effectively contained or neutralized, both practically and symbolically, the color line becomes considerably more fluid.¹⁸⁰

During formal *de jure* racial slavery, racial categories of identification were considerably more fluid than the periods of struggle and backlash following. During racial slavery, there were categories such as ‘free colored persons,’ ‘black,’ ‘black slaves,’ ‘mulatto,’ and ‘mulatto slaves.’ With a secured system of racial domination, the terms designating racial categorization were considerably more ‘abundant,’ so to speak. That is, because of a guaranteed structure in place that

¹⁸⁰ Jared Sexton. (2008). *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN, 12.

effectively contained resistance and maintained domination, as Sexton interprets, the strictures of racial categorization were relaxed and so categories ‘enjoyed’ a sort of ease in elaboration and proliferation. Inversely, in the periods that black liberation was thought to be achieving certain heights such as reconstruction, the color line became considerably more tightened so that by 1900 the census recognized only ‘Black’ or ‘Negro’ as the designation offered to afro-descended people. As Sexton aims to show here, the pluralization of racial terms might actually point more to a situation of political *inefficacy* rather than resistant, liberatory practice. In recent years, the proliferation of terms of mixed race has seemed to enjoy a wider space of recognition, but how might we think about the consolidated institutionalization of certain oppressive tactics, such as mass incarceration, ‘border patrol,’ police brutality, the assault on voting rights, etc. in this frame?

If Sexton’s understanding of the relation between history, terms of identity, and racial domination is the case, what demands our attention in the present is not the pluralization and elaboration of specific terms/categories, but the conceptual structure that undergirds our use of them. As a concept/metaphor, heterodox intersectionality *makes space* for thinking about identity outside categorial logics though it does not provide a theory or methodology to this end. And perhaps, as we might consider, it purposely *does not* do so, instead modeling an approach to the complexity of identity that exceeds claims about identity as representational. In so doing, I argue, the import of intersectionality lies in its active diagnosis and refusal of categorial logics *while* paying attention to the hierarchies of power, status, and material relations that are maintained in those logics. Liberatory thought and politics must respond from within this matrix.

Mixed race identity is/could be exemplary in this sense given its tenuous position in U.S. American politics at the moment, though, as I am arguing, it is not by way of increased descriptive accuracy, or becoming more ‘real’ by way of recognition. ‘Mixed race’ is in a curious spot given

what Ronald Sundstrom in “Being and Being Mixed Race” describes as its status as a ‘human kind’ that is “not as real as racial categories like ‘black’ or ‘white’ in the U.S. today.”¹⁸¹ By ‘human kind’ Sundstrom is referring to “institutional and intentional, rather than natural” kinds whose reality comes in degrees: “As...social forces [labels, institutions, individual intentions, laws, mores, values, traditions] change or fade from existence, so do the human kinds those forces are associated with.”¹⁸² As Sundstrom concludes, the question that is most pressing is not *if* ‘mixed race’ will become a more ‘real’ human kind, but *how* it might become this—“how do we further this reality without being complicit in racist hierarchy?” he asks.¹⁸³ “We want to name ourselves, we do not want to accept racial identities that do not reflect how we see ourselves, but neither do we want to reinforce white privilege and extend racial hierarchy.”¹⁸⁴ This is a question that framed much of the critical inquiry into mixed race identity in the 90s and early 2000s, and understandably so. While the expressed goal of resisting the reinforcement of oppressions is no doubt laudable, it is however ultimately an impossibility given the concomitant goal of ‘naming’ in order to ‘better represent.’ As heterodox intersectionality shows us, naming ‘mixed race’ so as to ‘make visible’ or ‘better represent’ what standard historical racial classification schemas in the U.S. appear to occlude via their own representational logics, follows the same drive towards representation and classification that informs the problem of invisibility of mixed race in the first place. The desire to fill the gap through description of what’s ‘in’ the gap (and implicitly, what is *not*) abides by the same kind of categorial logic that produces the problem of occlusion of mixed race. Practices of naming and representation, as I’ve described, obscure not a more ‘accurate’ representation, but attention to the forces that manifest the imperative to name. Why is it that we ‘need’ names to

¹⁸¹ Sundstrom (2001), 301.

¹⁸² Ibid, 295-296.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 301.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

‘better represent’ us racially? My claim is that this imperative is birthed out of a particular historical-conceptual order of racial domination that runs deep. A political ontology of race illuminates these depths and shows what is at stake in the development of a liberatory politics of identity.

Writing in 2001 of what he calls the ‘partial reality’ of mixed race, Sundstrom’s work urges us to inquire into the status of mixed race today and what this has to say about the current broader state of liberatory politics and identity. On the whole, our uses of ‘mixed race’ still have quite a way to go in resisting complicity with forms of oppression. As discussed in the introduction, popular understandings of mixed race continue to engage in logics of colorism, antiblackness, heteronormativity, biological reproduction, and American exceptionalism/nationalism. We have yet to develop what Alcoff or Sundstrom advocate—a substantive ‘mixed race identity’ that actively confronts these patterns of oppression. My contention is that ‘mixed race’ ultimately cannot do this work of resistance *in this way*. As a product of the act of naming meant to better represent or capture a presumed constituency, or as Sundstrom might describe, as a ‘full human kind,’ mixed race identity is ill-equipped to more fully challenge our oppressive historical political order. Rather, we might follow the provocations of scholars such as Michele Elam and Minelle Mahtani in their articulations of mixed race as “a relation among things and people”¹⁸⁵ and something that “cannot be pinned own to a single semantic definition,”¹⁸⁶ respectively. As Mahtani writes, “[Mixed Race] can be understood only by relating its shifting meanings and contours to historically and geographically located processes.”¹⁸⁷ Elam similarly puts forth a notion of ‘mixed

¹⁸⁵ Elam, Michelle. (2011). *The Souls of Mixed Folk: Race, Politics, and Aesthetics in the New Millenium*. Stanford University Press: Stanford, CA, 161.

¹⁸⁶ Mahtani, Minelle. (2014). *Mixed Race Amnesia: Resisting the Romanticisation of Multiraciality*. UBC Press: Vancouver, BC, 31.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 31-32.

race,’ likening it to race in general, as a process of sociopolitical meaning making that “emerges within the context of bargaining, negotiation, and cultural expectation that makes sense of and gives importance to racialized performances.¹⁸⁸” Elam is critical of a politics of mixed race as representative or as a ‘sign,’ claiming that “however well meaning, many of the most common signatures of mixed race—checking census boxes, installing mixed race people on television, film, fiction, and stage, requiring mixed race-sensitive school criteria—are signs that do not necessarily fulfill the greater promises of mixed race doing, acting, thinking.”¹⁸⁹ Attention ought to be paid to what ‘mixed race’ *does*, what it generates and provokes in terms of sociopolitical sense-making.

The right to ‘accuracy’ or self-identification is an empty political ideal (though it is certainly a useful strategic political mechanism), since at base social identities were never about neutral classification. As *political* social signifiers, they arise in a matrix of relations of and enable and enact ways of relating and belonging that have been contrary to human social flourishing. Because self-identification (which is not to say ‘identity’ wholesale) will not save us, we need to think more fully about existing constructions of the sociopolitical order and ways to contest modes of sense making inherent to it. A refigured conception of identity can be one vehicle/mode through which to do this. As it stands, “mixed race people have been made intelligible in ways that reinforce both racialized and gendered categories, their bodies routinely disciplined through ongoing processes of regulation to keep them securely *in place*.”¹⁹⁰ We ought to contest this notion of being ‘in place,’ of naming, of representing, of being made visible according to dominant modes of perception.

¹⁸⁸ Elam (2011), 176.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 201.

¹⁹⁰ Mahtani (2014), 19.

Mixed race cannot be pinned down to a ‘thing’ or ‘site’ that seeks to (better) represent a group of people understood to be mixed race *instead of* (or even alongside) other ‘races’ similarly understood as something one is/has or a point/location *from which* engages the world. While Parker and Song are mistaken in their depiction of intersectionality as providing a vision of social identity as a (static) point where various backgrounds and social relations intersect/meet, they are correct in arguing for a conception of ‘mixed race’ that exceeds these logics of categorialization. In analyzing their claims about the relation between intersectionality and mixed race, my argument is that *heterodox* intersectionality is actually quite helpful as an impetus for thinking mixed race via more liberatory logics. In showcasing the *stakes* of conceptualizing identity given the depths to which categorial logics persist, it insists that the problem cannot be remedied through mere representation. Simply naming, fixing, placing ‘mixed race’ at a point or confluence of histories, cultures, backgrounds does not suffice. Instead, we need to conceptualize identity as a practice that informs patterns of social and political relations. The import of intersectionality, as I wish to argue, is that it wards against thinking that is quick to offer a simple solution to the problem of invisibility. It shows how mere representation according to dominant epistemological and political structures will simply repeat and reinscribe the problem of invisibility (perhaps through hypervisibility, another side of the same coin). And so, intersectionality points to a conceptual gap that cannot be filled by the process of naming. ‘Mixed race identity’ as a process of providing terminology to describe a given constituency according to certain criteria, such as phenotypic ‘look,’ racial experience, multiplicity of cultural backgrounds, and/or parentage/racial lineage is mistaken in that it mirrors too closely the conceptual form of identity that reproduces oppressions. That is, it engages in a dynamic of race and racialization as a matter of classification—whether biological or sociological—rather than a political machination that produces the appearance of given, distinct

categories of people, naturalizing the relations instantiated by this politics. In what follows I explore attempts at a liberatory conceptual modeling of social identity inspired by the import of heterodox intersectionality and analyze what I identify as limitations to these approaches before finally gesturing toward a positive articulation of what a revised ‘mixed race identity’ could mean.

III. On the Conceptual Structure of Identity

So far I have argued for an interpretation of intersectionality as a concept that does not provide a theory of identity *itself* but rather outlines what is at stake, politically and conceptually, in a liberatory politics of ‘mixed race identity.’ What is at stake is a radically different conceptual schema informing how we think of ‘identity,’ rather than the ‘uncovering’ of a substantive ‘mixed race identity’ that intersectionality can itself help us articulate. Not only can intersectionality *not* do this, but, following its heterodox readers, it importantly shows us why this *should not* be the aim. Making mixed race identity a matter of representation performs the same operation of identity that assumes standard, separable, racial categories such as black, white, Asian, Latino/a and it is this assumption of standard racial categories as separate and exclusive that generates the ‘invisibility’ of mixed race. Thus, the aim of a liberatory politics in regards to identity must concern a transformation of the assumptions we bring to our understanding of the concept of identity.

I wish to conclude this chapter by considering two proposals emergent within heterodox readings of intersectionality for understanding identity. I do so to highlight what I find to be a continued reliance on notions of unity and oneness that maintain identity as a *site*, however complex or dynamic. This maintenance concedes too much to representational logics, I argue. We ought to more radically confront conceptualizations of identity so that identity is no longer

understood as something that ‘is’ or something that can be possessed or something that can be located, but rather something that *moves*. If the problem is precisely this drive to hold in place through representation, description of a particular constituency, etc., then we ought to experiment with modes of sense that refuse identity as *something* that is held in place or holds a place. Instead, as I gesture at, identity might be understood as movement itself. It is difficult to get at precisely what this means or might amount to, but I think, in part, the goal is precisely this exercise of thought—of trying to wrap one’s head around a different mode of sense-making in a system without supports to do so.

If mixed race identity is to be figured in a liberatory manner, it will be through concerns generated within particular, concrete historical-political moments that employ a mode of against the grain sense-making such that notions of discreteness for identity is contested in its very practice. The goal would be to loosen the conceptual hold of identity as a ‘thing’ to *have* or to *be*, as a point or location from which to engage the world, and as primarily a *noun* rather than a verb. What might it mean for mixed race identity to be transparently generative and generating, to primarily be about relations or potential relations and the movement therein, rather than about the ability to generate descriptions that ‘better represent’ our racial world?

In what follows I explore proposals by Carastathis and Lugones for understanding identity given the provocations of heterodox intersectionality. While I will be focusing on each theorist’s more abstract conceptualizations of social identity, both theorists’ broader work attends to patterns of racialization and intersecting structures of oppression, and so we might consider the potentials and the limits of what we might call ‘mixed race identity’ through the lenses they provide. Overall, Carastathis and Lugones aim to extend Crenshaw’s articulation of intersectionality in order to reconceive identity and social relations through a liberatory logic. In emphasizing ‘unity’ and

‘fusion,’ respectively, I argue that these author’s views are unable to capture the conceptual structure of identity necessitated by liberatory thought and politics. I will first provide an overview of Lugones’ call to recognize ‘fusion’ as a step inspired by but which moves beyond the logics of intersectionality. I then explore Carastathis’ specific revisioning of the concept of identity as coalition. I argue that both rely on a background notion of ‘unity’ that does not escape the extent of heterodox intersectionality’s own criticism of categorial logics. Instead, emphasizing unity, as I will argue, *rearranges* the conceptual structure of identity understood through categorial logics, but it does not ultimately escape the reliance on understanding identity as a drive toward representation, naming, placing, etc.

In “Radical Multiculturalism and Women of Color Feminisms,” Lugones describes intersectionality as a metaphor/concept that operates within what she calls the ‘logic of oppression,’ rather than the ‘logic of resistance.’ She poses the “logic of intersectionality” as one that *maintains rather than directly challenges* categorialism, even *while* expressing the problems with categorialism. For, in order to identify the location that ‘resists telling’ in the ‘intersection’ of forms of oppression to which intersectionality draws our attention, one needs to accept certain categorial formulations. Said another way, in order for the metaphor of intersections to work—in order for it to point out the *gap* and *inability* to account for certain positions—we need to utilize the language that inspires this gap in the first place; we need to say, for example, ‘race *and* gender’ and so concede in language their separability. This reading is not at odds with my understanding of heterodox intersectionality as that which calls forth but does not itself enact a radical revisioning of sense. At the same time, Lugones’ heavy glosses on intersectionality as necessarily invested in categorial logics seem unfair. Read most generously, however, Lugones’ criticism is not against intersectionality as such, since it never understood itself as *providing* an entirely new logic in the

first place. For present purposes, then, I wish to focus on Lugones' extension of Crenshaw, that is, her articulation of a 'logic of fusion' or 'coalescence,' that she argues allows us to "move fully into resistance."¹⁹¹

For Lugones, while the 'first unmasking' of moving from oppression→resistance lies in intersectionality's call for multiplicity and a recognition of the invisibilities produced by categorial logics of oppression, the 'second unmasking' must move beyond "presupposing the categories of oppression to be separable."¹⁹² I take it here that Lugones is not claiming that Crenshaw herself believes categories to be separable, but that for intersectionality to achieve what it does—namely, uncovering the violences of the intersection—one needs to *presuppose* separability. Lugones wishes to move us away from logics that demand this presupposition in order to 'make sense' of a given situation in the first place. She hopes to build the infrastructure of a logic that refuses this supposed necessity—hence, her move toward 'fusion.' 'Fusion' is what is always already the case when it comes to gender, race, sexuality, and the like. As Lugones writes, "The logic of domination imposes a categorial conception of what is in fact a fusion or intermeshing of oppressions....The intersecting hides the fusion. That is, the intersecting hides the inseparability of oppression."¹⁹³ Understanding social identities through the logic of fusion shows us how, instead of 'gender' and 'race' intersecting as (at one point, logically) separable categories, it "impinges on people without any possibility of separation," thus creating multiple genders in the sense that "females racialized as non-white are not of the same gender as white females."¹⁹⁴ While I do not have time or space to fully unpack this claim here, I wish to note, how, in its form, this provocation disrupts categorial

¹⁹¹ María Lugones. (2014). "Radical Multiculturalism and Women of Color Feminisms." *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*. 13.1, 73

¹⁹² Ibid, 75.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 76.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

logics by aiming to speak *within* a logics of resistance, one that refuses the presumption of separability from the start. ‘Fusion’ is meant to inspire recognition of ongoing coalitional practice as well as further potential for coalitional movement, since as Lugones writes, “each fusion is lived and understood relationally.”¹⁹⁵ One cannot ‘get out’ of this relationality. Fusion, for Lugones, is an ontological fact of sorts. Identity reconceived through the terms of fusion begins from this assumption—that is, it begins from an analytic space that takes identity as political relations as its locus of analysis rather than identity as an individual descriptor. According to Lugones, intersectionality only brings us so far and can bring us no further because of its starting points, which rely, as Lugones posits, on categorial logics that intersectionality must first assume in order to ‘get off the ground,’ so to speak, and this, she argues, prevents the movement towards a resistant logic. The logic of fusion is the necessary additional lens that allows one to speak from a resistant logic. For Lugones, intermeshedness or fusion must be “superimposed” onto intersectionality. Lugones takes herself to be challenging the starting point of intersectionality through the superimposition of always already intermeshed oppressions such that fusion is where we begin in our conceptual analysis.

Lugones’ provocations certainly move in the right direction in many ways. They challenge forms of sense-making *in the act* of conceptualizing identity, oppression, and resistance. In this way, I support Lugones’ objective. Yet, I am concerned with the language and logic of ‘fusion.’ Reading Lugones generously on her assessment of intersectionality, even if ‘fusion’ goes further than intersectionality in *temporally* challenging the logics of categorialization by affirming the always-already nature of fusion, it still makes of identity-as-fusion a ‘thing,’ the result of a *certain* fusion, which we are able to describe as the fused ‘thing’ or representation. Lugones uses the

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 77.

language that suggests a separability of ‘fusions’ to describe what I take to be identities informed by now-understood-as-inseparable categories: “*each fusion* is lived and understood relationally and “*the fusion* is a resistance to multiple oppressions.”¹⁹⁶ “We live *as* fusions” according to Lugones.¹⁹⁷ There will be a “great multiplicity of resistant race/gender fusions” within the superimposed “site” of resistance formed by the logic of fusion. This, to me, appears to move the matter of representation and attempts to ‘capture’-via-description to another level—that of ‘fused’ constituencies or perhaps, coalitions. Lugones seeks to extend Crenshaw’s work on intersectionality through speaking in terms of ‘fusions,’ but, in specifying ‘each,’ she seems to reproduce stratification on a different scale. I do not wish to suggest, in contesting this mode of stratification, that identity ought to be entirely fluid and ‘cover’ (or be available to cover) everyone and everything, but that identity is not the sort of thing that can or should do either. In fact, it’s not a thing to grasp at all but something else, movement itself perhaps. Perhaps it is a fault of language that we cannot escape the assumption of identity, however radically reconceived, as a *site*. My claim is that we ought to continually push back on this tendency. Conceptually, we need to outline a structure that refuses *this* particular impulse—that is, refuses the urge to address social identity through language meant to ‘represent,’ and specifically, to represent *accurately*. Lugones does not use the language of accuracy, but she is concerned with delineating the “different fusions” that are lived from within a logic of resistance, a logic of fusion, which appears to showcase some investment in outlining the contours of specific fusions that can then lead to liberatory coalitional praxis. My criticism is not directed at any role specification might play in understanding liberatory thought and politics, but to suggest that identity itself is not what ought to be understood through the register of description and as something one is or has, or a site where one is located and so

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 77. Emphasis mine.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 80, Emphasis mine.

something that can be distinguished according to its inherence in, attachment to, or positioning of a person or grouping of people.

I find resonances between Lugones' discussion of fusion and Carastathis' work on identity and drawing these out can help understand what I find to be the limitations of both of these analyses on the concept of identity. Carastathis' work more transparently underscores the drive toward unity and oneness within identity, showcasing again, I argue, how categorial logics are *relocated* rather than *removed* in theorization on the conceptual structure of identity.

Carastathis focuses on refiguring identity for the purposes of a liberatory social politic. Building on a line from "Mapping the Margins" wherein Crenshaw describes identities as coalitions or potential coalitions, Carastathis (re)defines identities as "internally heterogeneous, complex unities constituted by their internal differences and dissonances and by internal as well as external relations of power," aiming to enable "effective political alliances that cross existing identity categories" and "pursue[s] a liberatory politics of interconnection" in the process.¹⁹⁸ The hope is that this intersectional critique illuminates differences within groups (and within individuals) such that the normative operations of any identity category, understood as discrete and singular, are continually disrupted/contested. The result of this continual disruption is a notion of identity *as* coalition. Intersectionality, Carastathis argues, "reveals that [the] distinction between 'identity' and 'coalition' rests upon an exclusive focus on differences between groups, failing to consider differences within groups."¹⁹⁹ In order to develop a conception of identity that attends to a liberatory logic, then, Carastathis emphasizes the dynamism *within* identity and the ways in which identities are continually constituted by internal and external differences and exercises of power. She examines how what she calls a "coalitional conception of identity" is at work in the

¹⁹⁸ Carastathis (2016), 165.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 163.

solidarity activism of Somos Hermanas (We Are Sisters), “the solidarity project of the Alliance against Women’s Oppression (AAWO), housed in the San Francisco Women’s Building”²⁰⁰ and its transnational solidarity work in response to the CIA’s Contra War on Nicaragua. Carastathis focuses on organizer, activist, and national co-chair of Somos Hermanas, Carmen Vázquez, in order to buttress and illuminate her coalitional conception of identity. As she writes, “[Vázquez’s] writing and oral history reveal the impact of Somos Hermanas on her life trajectory, suggesting that this organizing experience was a crucial factor in the integration of her multiple identities and political commitments.”²⁰¹ Vázquez’s account, according to Carastathis, provides evidence that a coalitional conception of identity “enables us to cross lines of difference in building alliances, which is crucial to any effective liberation movement”²⁰² which in turn helps members to “integrate their identities as people.”²⁰³ As Carastathis illuminates through archival research, “engaging in solidarity activism with Somos Hermanas enabled Vázquez to integrate multiple identities, finding, perhaps, a home for all aspects of her self in this coalition.”²⁰⁴ One example of finding this home came in Vázquez’s embracing her butch identity which “was made possible by the many women of color who claimed identity within a liberation framework.”²⁰⁵ Additionally, as Carastathis claims, “one central lesson [to be drawn from Somos Hermanas] is that understandings one’s identity as a coalition enables one to cross naturalized boundaries imposed by systems of oppression, for instance, national borders,” given the group members travel between the U.S. and Nicaragua.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 167.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 169.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid, 170.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 180.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 182.

Carastathis's analysis of Vázquez and Somos Hermanas offers ways to further theoretically flesh out what could be meant by Crenshaw's suggestion to understand "race as a coalition between men and women of color" or "race...as a coalition of straight and gay people of color."²⁰⁶ In so doing, Carastathis, like Lugones, aims to give language to a conceptual structure of identity that does not abide by standard categorial logics, however, Carastathis explicitly retains rather than foregoes notions of unity and oneness.²⁰⁷ Carastathis is more transparent in her acceptance of this especially in regards to her emphasis on 'unity' as an underlining feature of 'identity' and the locating of dynamism—the "differences and dissonances" of identity—as 'internal.' 'Coalition,' though emphasizing complexity and movement, seems to involve, for Carastathis, 'integration' at the level of political movement as well as one's personal "embodied identity."²⁰⁸ Carastathis describes the latter as "coalitions of one," as a "way to "[align] with all parts of oneself"²⁰⁹ and as "strategies of survival for those who are regarded by their 'natural' communities as outsiders, traitors, and fakers."²¹⁰ The goal of integration is integral to both the political movement level and also "the very personal level of one's own embodied identity" since, as she claims, "members of

²⁰⁶ Crenshaw (1991), 1299.

²⁰⁷ Lugones does explicitly contest notions of unity, especially in her earlier work on "curdled subjectivity." Here she describes how the logic of oppression "trains" the multiple into "fragmented unities" (*Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, 128). It is important to her to understand how this "unity" is constructed. "The assumption of unity" as she writes, "is an act of split separation; as in conceiving of what is multiple as unified, what is multiple is understood as internally separable, divisible into what makes it one and the remainder" (128). My claims about Lugones' notion of 'fusion' is that even through a new logic that foregoes the possibility of separability from the start and engages in a rejection of a *simplistic* 'unity,' it nevertheless relies on a conceptual structure wherein one can identify 'each' fusion, that this is something we can and should do in order to engage in more liberatory logics. I contest the notion that a liberatory approach to identity is *primarily* about avoiding separability, though this is certainly required given the current mode of thinking about identity via axes of difference. Instead the primary task might be to negate the logics that presume the ability of identity to represent a given constituency and so to negate the logics that assumes better or worse ways of representing identity.

²⁰⁸ Carastathis (2016), 182.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

multiply oppressed groups face the existential challenge of constructing internal as well as external bridges.”²¹¹

Though Carastathis’s conceptualization of identity, in ways similar to Lugones’, is a step in the right direction of contesting categorial logics, I wish to suggest that it still maintains a structure that concedes too much to categorial logics. My concern is that in emphasizing identity as a complex *unity* and a matter of integration, its dynamism is relegated to a locatable *site*. Identities, on a coalitional conception of identity, are still tasked with the labor of ‘bridging,’ that in effect, must manifest a ‘bridge,’ a site wherein identity is now realized.

Carastathis’s account urges a reconceptualization of identity groups as “productively conceptualized as coalitions by virtue of their internal heterogeneity and the tacit or explicit creative acts through which they are organized and represented as unified.”²¹² What I wish to make apparent here, however, is that pluralizing identity on both an inter- and intra- group (and self) level maintains the idea that we can piece together or take apart like a puzzle the various aspects of identities. Similar to Lugones’ articulation of multiple ‘fusions,’ this way of conceptualizing identity lends itself to merely relocating categorial logics rather than contesting them in the fullest sense. How, instead, do we go about articulating a notion of identity that troubles *any* notion of discreteness (and without lapsing into a neutral fluidity of sorts)? This is what is required of identity more generally and so, we ought to think about a liberatory account of ‘mixed race identity’ through this demand. Ultimately, we must shift our goals for the concept of identity away from *better representing* identity, reality, and resistance, to understanding primarily what is/could be generative about identity in terms of enacting liberatory patterns of belonging.

²¹¹ Ibid, 182.

²¹² Ibid, 184.

Chapter 3 Queering the Time of Mixed Race: Toward a Liberatory Temporal Politic

In this chapter I explore the social-temporal dimensions of dominant multiracial politics in the contemporary U.S. Scholars such as Maria P. Root, G. Reginald Daniel, and Naomi Zack have articulated and advocated for, in some form or fashion, a vision of contemporary formations of mixed race as a radical challenge to our past and present racial order.²¹³ It is a challenge, these authors suggest, that can bring about a more liberatory racial future. As Root states, “Contemporary subversive declarations [of mixed race] have shifted from a goal and consequence of creating a superior group of persons and elite type of ‘person of color’ to a refusal to continue with racial rules as generations of us have learned.”²¹⁴ It is this refusal, this challenge to an ‘old’ racial order, it is posited, that distinguishes contemporary mixed race politics as liberatory and as that which can (and will) thrust us into a radically different racial future.

Root frames the political potential of mixed race by locating it within a temporal order constructed through distinct moments of ‘past’ and ‘present.’ She continually uses language suggesting that mixed race today brings forth and occupies a radically different temporal-social order. For example, she describes, at the time of her writing, that this is the “first time in history” that we see publically and visibly people who matter-of-factly “acknowledge their mixed heritage.”²¹⁵ She describes discourses on mixed race that reflect pathology and self-hatred as “relics of an era of history that is gone.”²¹⁶ She suggests that the Supreme Court ruling of *Loving v. Virginia* provided a “different historical context” for those “coming of age...with the public

²¹³ Maria P. Root. (2003). “Five Mixed-Race Identities: From Relic to Revolution.” *New Faces in a Changing America: Multiracial Identity in the 21st Century*. Edited by Loretta Winters. Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, 4; G. Reginald Daniel. (2010). *More Than Black: Multiracial Identity and New Racial Order*. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, PA; Naomi Zack. (1993). *Race and Mixed Race*. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, PA.

²¹⁴ Root (2003), 4.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 14.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 4.

acknowledgment of mixed race.”²¹⁷ She repeats the phrase “come of age” in the three sentences following to dramatically stage the generation of individuals who inhabit a ‘radically’ different present in contradistinction to a past that has been left behind. Furthermore, Root employs turns of phrases such as “at this point”²¹⁸ and “at this juncture”²¹⁹ to describe the specificity of a temporal period, that, as she argues, allows now for the “dismantling of the racial system”²²⁰ and the recognition of mixed race identity as “natural and revolutionary.”²²¹

But what are the effects of naming, via absolutist temporal terms, the emergence of a racial order that, as Root positions it, is better, more revolutionary, more liberatory? Root’s analysis demands that the past be isolated, fixed, located *as past*, and thus, as ‘over,’ and as ‘overcome.’ It produces an orientation to the past as a foil through which we develop the contours of the future. The past is useful only to the extent that it can be or has been left behind. Root’s analysis follows a historical-temporal schema that is premised on a linear narrative of progress. The present *advances* from a past that has been left behind and to which we cannot return. As a ‘relic,’ it is now ‘gone.’ The present, in turn, as disconnected wholly from the past, now provides a new generation the glorious ‘coming of age’ in a different and *better* time and place. It is a time, as Root triumphantly states, “when race is defined less by biology than by social construction... when most first-generation mixed-race persons have not been a product of rape, war, or slavery and have a visible cohort of mixed-race peers and role models in the media” and “amid a cohort that has not sustained the trauma of racism to the same degree and frequency as their parents and grandparents.”²²² Notwithstanding the questionable nature of Root’s descriptions of present day

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid, 17.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 18.

²²⁰ Ibid, 17.

²²¹ Ibid, 18.

²²² Ibid, 4.

social experience, her organization of temporality and positioning of mixed race as an achievement of our present (and by extension, a projection of our future) ought to give us pause. Her depiction of such strict differences between past and present social conditions and the notion of unidirectional sociopolitical betterment, I argue, is rooted in superficial visions of progress and partake in a politics of time that is reproductive. In what follows, I turn to the work of Walter Benjamin and Lee Edelman to help elucidate these points. I then explore specific aspects of the politics of mixed race regarding its investment in normative heterosexuality in advancing both literal reproduction and the reproduction of the given social order. This is something, I argue, we ought to contest if mixed race politics truly aims to radically confront the social order. To that end, I conclude via development of a liberatory temporal schema and its application at the site of notions of ‘inheritance’ that can help inform a revised political vision of ‘mixed race.’

I. Reproductive Futurism and the Violence of Progress

Root’s sweeping generalizations about the temporal distinctions regarding mixed race politics in the U.S. is paradigmatic of an approach to history and the social that I will refer to as reproductive. What I mean by this is that while on the surface Root depicts a past that has been overcome and a more liberatory present that has taken its place, in order for her to make such grand claims, the narrative of progress she deploys must rely on the continuation of certain features of the (oppressive) social order. Walter Benjamin articulates this idea in his essay

“On the Concept of History,” or alternatively titled, “Theses on the Philosophy of History.”²²³ Here, he critiques narratives of ‘progress’ that inform standard approaches to history, time, and

²²³ Walter Benjamin. (1940). “On the Concept of History.” Trans. Dennis Redmond. (2005). From <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm>.

politics. Instead of understanding ‘progress’ as that which enacts or is a representation of fundamental change, Benjamin shows how the concept is invested in a notion of time that is ‘empty’ and ‘homogenous.’ As Benjamin shows, ‘progress’ existed (and I would claim, *exists*) as a ‘dogmatic claim,’ in that it is represented as 1) the “progress of humanity itself,” 2) “something corresponding to an *endless perfectability* of humanity, and 3) “something entirely unstoppable” and “self-activating.”²²⁴ These three facets coalesce in an understanding of progress devoid of attention to the ‘here-and-now.’ This flattened, empty version of time activated by notions of progress manifests a barrier to liberatory transformation in that it conceptually refuses the type of rupture in time, politics, and history necessary for developing an alternative epistemological, conceptual, political, hermeneutic, and social schema.

Benjamin shows how the modern notion of ‘progress’ actually maintains harms perpetuated against oppressed groups via its insistence on forward moving, unending perfectability amidst the (obscured) ruins that conditions the intelligibility of this ‘progress’ in the first place. He offers the image of the Angel of History, a figure in a monoprint from artist Paul Klee, to explain this. While dominant paradigms understand history as an additive chain of events, with ‘progress’ helping advance history towards its grand culmination, the Angel of History turns their face to witness the past as a single catastrophe, a pile of untangle-able ruins. As Benjamin writes, “Where we see the appearance of a chain of events [the Angel of History] sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet.”²²⁵ He wishes to piece back together the destruction, but as Benjamin writes, “A storm is blowing from paradise,” which “drives him irresistibly into the future...that which we call progress, is *this* storm.”²²⁶ In this

²²⁴ Benjamin (1940), XIII.

²²⁵ Ibid, IX.

²²⁶ Ibid.

formulation, progress is the name given for the spoils of the ‘victors’ of history, which comes in the form of further violences enacted upon those ‘defeated.’

Benjamin provides a useful image of what contemporary queer theorists such as Lee Edelman might refer to as a reproductive futurism. Reproductive futurism, generally, is an orientation to social and political life wherein the figure of ‘the future’ motivates all politics, political motivation, and the political itself such that insofar as this regulating ideal of the future informs *all* attempts to produce a better, more desirable social order, it remains reproductive of the current social order. It is ultimately conservative in that it works to “*affirm* a structure” and “*authenticate* a social order.”²²⁷ In an oppressive social order, reproductive temporal politics work to uphold the status quo, however inadvertently and however seemingly minutely, and so uphold a range of intermeshed oppressions. Riffing off bell hooks, it upholds the heteronormative white supremacist settler colonial capitalist patriarchy in which we continually find ourselves.

Reproductive futurism entails the presupposition of the necessary connection between one’s participation in the political and a notion of the future. Indeed, it is the idea that the political itself is structured by the promise of a future such that politics loses all conceptual coherence outside of this belief in the future as an orientating device. At base, every political vision is a vision of futurity, according to Edelman, and visions of futurity are emblemized by the figure of the Child. As he writes, “we are no more able to conceive of a politics without a fantasy of the future than we are able to conceive of a future without the figure of the child.”²²⁸

²²⁷ Lee Edelman. (1998). “The Future is Kid Stuff: Queer Theory, Disidentification, and the Death Drive.” *Narrative*. 6.1, 19.

²²⁸ *Ibid*, 21.

He is operating within a Lacanian conception of the imaginary²²⁹ wherein the figure of the Child does not equate to historical or actual children, but to the *image* of the child that he argues is at work in any articulation of political motivation. It is what provides the sense background for any envisioning of a more desirable social order. “The child,” as Edelman writes, “has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and been enshrined as the figure for whom the order must be held in perpetual trust.”²³⁰

Homosexuality is what falls out of this ‘being-for’ the child, according to Edelman. Historically, as Edelman argues, queerness has figured as the abjected outside of the imaginary that informs reproductive futurism. Queerness is what represents the lack of interest *in* and the destruction *of* the future understood as the fundamental register through which life, politics, the future, society, reason, intelligibility, etc. is manifest. In order to elucidate this point, Edelman quotes what radical blogger k-punk describes as the “self-styled Guardians of Civilization,” such as historical political and theological leaders who claim that homosexuals are “those who care nothing for the future...the gravediggers of society” or that “Gay activity is wholeheartedly determined to do battle against human life.”²³¹ While these types of claims have receded from dominant U.S. society, normative heterosexuality is still largely operative in the ubiquity of the everyday and in, as I will go on to show in the next section, the dominant politics of multiracial activism. Here, I flesh out this normative heterosexuality of mixed race, showcasing how it follows a linear notion of progress. Given the articulations of Benjamin and Edelman, this ought to give us pause. If a liberatory social politics is what mixed race politics seek, visions of temporality

²²⁹ Edelman’s articulation of reproductive futurism and the image of the Child is developed through a Lacanian psychoanalytic frame, the breadth and depth of which I do not have the time to explore here.

²³⁰ Ibid, 21.

²³¹ K-punk (Mark Fisher). (2005). “We Aren’t the World.” From <http://k-punk.abstractdynamics.org/archives/005071.html>

informing them must be radically different. This will have repercussions for how we think about ‘mixed race’ and ‘family’, which is why I will turn in my last section to a discussion of race via queer conceptions of inheritance and kinship.

II. The Normative Heterosexuality of Mixed Race

The late 20th century multiracial movement was largely advanced through the desire for recognition of both selves and families of mixed heritage. It is no surprise then that anthologies at the time highlighted the familial basis of concerns for recognition. That is, the need for recognition was motivated by struggles associated with articulating familial ties given what was (and is) an assumption that those within a given family unit will be the same race. In challenging this notion of the typical family—the singularly raced family, e.g. the ‘white family’ or ‘black family’—the multiracial movement sought acknowledgment of interracial relationships, mixed race families, and mixed race individuals, primarily children of interracial partnerships. Yet, in order to gain this recognition, depictions of family *as family* still needed to be palatable to the dominant social order. That is, in order to gain *one* form of ‘emancipatory’ recognition from dominant culture, assumptions about heterosexuality and biological reproduction were affirmed in the process. Michele Elam chalks this up to the “unself-reflective” moves of “mixed race education” that “replicates traditional prejudices as part of the very process it uses to overturn others.”²³² Empirically, this can be seen in visual representation of mixed race and interraciality in editorials, anthologies, and blogs within the last thirty years. As Elam describes, “in the progressive effort to normalize the ‘atypical’ family of multiply raced individuals, targeted consumers are almost

²³² Michele Elam. (2011). *The Souls of Mixed Folk*. Stanford University Press: Stanford, CA, 29.

invariably cast as the imagined community of light-skinned children of suburban middle-class, heterosexual parents, as well as educators enlightened enough to recognize their peculiar needs.”²³³

In her particular attention to anthology covers, Elam notes that

In the admirable service of making visible one marginalized population [mixed race], effectively—and not accidentally—marginalize another: the images work together to codify anew the already iconic status of the heteronormative unit at the expense of other family formations. The photos are not merely reportage of a neutral demographic phenomenon, but the graphic naturalization of a particular political representation of a people. ...[this] extends the presumption of heterosexuality to the other images of solitary mixed race children—if they are the biological or adopted offspring of same-sex or intersex couples, we will never see it.²³⁴

When we look at the covers of various anthologies on mixed race in the 1990s and later, we often see faces—faces meant to represent a given demographic in need of being *seen*, being *recognized*. But in order for this need for representation to make *sense*, according to dominant logics, some level of uniformity is required. And so, normative models of mixed race consolidated around the child, the family, and the heterosexual (biologically) reproductive unit.

As Jared Sexton describes, the juncture between race and sexuality has always been unstable and in fact, the “politics of interracial sexuality” has been “fundamental to racial formation.”²³⁵ Yet, the depths of this often go unnoticed and insignificantly engaged. While attention has been paid to the mixed race child and interracial partnerships, it is done so at the expense of (and perhaps with the goal of making opaque) a focus on *sexuality*, of sexual relations. As discussed, popular and scholarly approaches to mixed race in recent decades focused on the figure of the mixed race individual and his/her attempts at carving out a mixed identity. It is argued that this is needed because of matters related to psychosocial health and wellbeing, especially in a

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid, 36.

²³⁵ Jared Sexton. (2008). *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN, 15.

context wherein a premium is placed on coherent belonging. This figure, of the healthy and well-adjusted mixed race child, has been used retroactively, according to Sexton, to grant support for the idea of healthy, happy, interracial heterosexual relationships. And so, “insofar as a figure of mixed race forms the backdrop for thinking interracial sexuality, the erasure of sexual encounter beyond or outside the heterosexual matrix is a *fait accompli*.”²³⁶ It is this denial or repression of the potential queerness of sexual encounter here that is reinscribed in the public avowal of interracial relations by way of the figure of the happy, healthy mixed race child. Access to thinking more broadly about the sexual encounter we might qualify as ‘interracial’ is foreclosed via its encasing in normative heterosexuality—including marriage, domesticity, suburbia, etc. And so, not only does the investments in normative heterosexuality foreclose direct attention to (hetero)sexuality and its historico-political relation to race, but it disavows sexual, queerly kin-ed, and even non-sexual but biologically reproductive (such as assistive reproductive technologies) encounters outside of this matrix.

In assuming and foregrounding heterosexuality and the normative, reproductive family unit, mixed race politics advances a politics of temporality that is reproductive. Read alongside Root’s depiction of the temporal breaks undergirding mixed race, dominant politics of mixed race, in their emphasis on heterosexual reproduction, understands the temporal achievement of mixed race by its leaving behind of a repressive past through biological and social reproduction. It assumes an ideology of always advancing progress tethered to the emergence of ‘mixed race’ conditioned by retrospectively-valORIZED reproductive hetero interracial relationships. As Sexton articulates, the figure of the celebrated mixed race child is held up in order to further the biologically reproductive heterosexuality of the interracial relationship as well as the social

²³⁶ Ibid, 7.

reproduction of the *expectation* of heterosexuality. The heterosexual family units represented on the anthology covers are assumed and so go ‘unseen’ through the visual attention paid to what is signified as ‘mixed race’ people and families.

The figure of the mixed race child is strikingly salient here. It is used as the figure upon which a celebratory and self-proclaimed resistant and liberating politics is forged. The mixed race child comes to signal the hope for racial transcendence, a harmonious racial future that redeems the harms perpetuated in the past. As Root describes, the challenge mixed race brings *today* is differentiated from positions historically that understood mixed race in a more negative light, or through a lack and a type of elitism found in ‘passing.’ Mixed race *today* is supposed to have formed under conditions that allow for better race relations because of a refusal to abide by the racial rules of generations prior. As Sara Ahmed describes, this political and temporal assessment is one way in which mixed race enters the public imaginary by way of spectacle today: that is, through an idealized hybridity. The mixed race body, as she describes, is imagined as a “meeting point between races....It is almost like the ‘mixed-race’ child...becomes a meeting point between two sides of the globe.”²³⁷ This image becomes articulated as an image of/for the future. The figure of the mixed race child and the heterosexuality implied in the multiracial family unit work together to maintain the racial-social order rather than fundamentally oppose it.

We need a liberatory temporal schema informing our thinking on mixed race in order to oppose this reproduction of the social order. Therefore, in the next section, I explore the work of Benjamin’s and Edelman’s positive project and describe what I call a liberatory approach to temporality that can inform a revised politics of mixed race and the ‘family.’ I draw on José Muñoz’s articulations of ‘queer futurity’ instead of following Edelman in his injunction against

²³⁷ Sara Ahmed. (2014). “Mixed Orientations.” *Subjectivity*. 7, 101.

the future in the form of an embrace of ‘queer negativity.’ I do so in order to argue for a notion of liberatory futurity that engages the present by looking to the past to challenge standard assumptions about the present and future of mixed race. Opposed to the forward movement of progress undergirding articulations of mixed race and the future currently, I argue in the last section for an exploration of queer kinship approaches to mixed race that trouble and reverse this reproductive temporality.

III. Conceptualizing a Temporal Politics through the ‘Tradition of the Oppressed’

To recall, Benjamin’s Angel of History is the figure that instead of seeing history as an additive chain of events, faces the past as a pile of ruins that he wishes to piece back together but cannot because of the force of a storm called ‘progress’ that is blowing him into the future. In a heteronormative politics of mixed race, the figure of the multiracial family as the heteronormative family and the mixed race child therein as the figure of the liberated future, work to produce an engagement with history that is lacking in attention to the oppressed. Root’s suggestion of a clear depiction of a past that has been left behind and a present and future awaiting the mixed race person to ‘come of age’ in a more liberatory time and place, forcefully removes attention to the historical violences at the root of mixed race in the U.S. It also neglects attention to forms of oppression in the present that continue alongside and, in the case of heteronormativity, are manifest *through* supposedly liberatory mixed race politics. We need a different temporal schema informing a politics of mixed race, one that demands a fuller engagement with history and the ongoing struggles of the oppressed.

Benjamin foregrounds the need for reconceptualizing the workings of history and temporality by way of what he calls the “tradition of the oppressed.” From this perspective, we learn that progress, as this ‘unstoppable’ force, works to cover over and continue the destruction of history, and in the name of a ‘new’, ‘better’ future. Counter to this, we must “arrive at a concept of history that corresponds to [the constant ‘emergency situation’ of the oppressed].”²³⁸ The task must be, according to Benjamin, to introduce “a real state of emergency.” This requires embodying the positioning of the Angel of History, actually *envisioning*, and as Benjamin might say, ‘having an experience with’ the catastrophe of the past and present, rather than attempting to cover it over with progress narratives. The construction of history, and I would argue, of futurity, lies in actually having an experience with the present, wrestling with its tensions, and ultimately “exploding the continuum of history” as Benjamin puts it.²³⁹ As he writes, “Where thinking suddenly halts in a constellation overflowing with tensions there it yields a *shock to the same*.”²⁴⁰ At base, a robust notion of liberatory futurity requires this sort of shock.

Aniruddha Chowdhury explains this, by way of Benjamin, as two approaches to the present—the present as either triumphant or catastrophic—which manifest two modes of temporality. As Chowdhury writes, “what is progress for a triumphant history is catastrophe for the historian of the oppressed.”²⁴¹ As Benjamin writes, quoted by Chowdhury, “The concept of progress must be grounded in the idea of catastrophe. That things are ‘status quo’ (that things just go on) *is* catastrophe (N9a, 1).”²⁴² There is no ‘neutral’ appeal to time and progress operative here. The idea that things just go on or ‘naturally’ unfold is a consequence of the hidden

²³⁸ Walter Benjamin. (1940). “On the Concept of History.” Trans. Dennis Redmond. (2005). From <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm>, VIII.

²³⁹ Ibid, XV.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, XVII, emphasis mine.

²⁴¹ Aniruddha Chowdhury. (2008). “Memory, Modernity, Repetition: Walter Benjamin’s History.” *Telos* 143, 22.

²⁴² Ibid.

sociopolitical catastrophic present. Oppressive temporal schemas are complex human constructs that are an effect of (and furthermore work to inform) oppressive social orders. As Stephen Dillon describes, “liberal Western notions of time and history...[show] a notion of history where the passage of time washes away the violence of then and now so that the future is free from the horrors of the past,”²⁴³ but the emergency situation of the oppressed shows us otherwise.

As Benjamin’s imagery helps us understand, dominant temporalities of progress, inspired and upheld through oppressive forces, produces a version of the future as a reproduction of the present, as change/transformation within proscribed boundaries of social order of progress. From the perspective of the oppressed, however, one can see this activity of ‘progress’ as the continuation of the racist, sexist, heterosexist, ableist, classist, etc. present and past we have been living. It is the continual piling on of rubble at the Angel of History’s feet. This is not a steady stream of rubble (imagine a conveyor belt of spread-out pieces) but a catastrophic *mound*. Time is not a steady flow anymore but a mass, an amplification, and change/transformation is a mere shifting of this rubble. In a social order that offers ‘progress’ in the form of an amplification or shifting of rubble in this catastrophic pile, it appears that a liberatory temporal politics calls for nothing short of a destruction of this social order, of this rubble heap, of this present. Indeed, as Edelman’s work on queer temporality goes on to suggest, this is precisely the case.

For Edelman, because homosexuality is what contests the ‘being-for the child’ that is required by any vision of politics as a vision of a better social order, it is not possible for homosexuality to be redeemed or recognized within this sociopolitical order. Historically, as Edelman argues, homosexuality has figured as the abjected outside of the imaginary that informs reproductive futurism. It is what represents the lack of interest in and the destruction *of* the future

²⁴³ Stephen Dillon. (2013). “It’s Here, It’s That Time:” Race, Queer Futurity, and the Temporality of Violence in *Born in Flames*.” *Women and Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, 23.1, 41.

understood as the fundamental register through which life, politics, the future, society, reason, intelligibility, etc. is manifest. The impulse within queer politics has been largely to contest this assessment of homosexuality as the “gravediggers of society” who “do battle against human life,”²⁴⁴ by resisting the equation of homosexuality with death, sterility, and the anti-social, but Edelman, in self-styled polemical fashion, argues for the *embrace* of such associations as the only option for the radical role of queerness today. As k-punk writes, “The role of the queer is a structural function for the social order as such, so even if the boundaries of sociality were extended to fully accommodate homosexuality, the disavowed-insistent agency of the death drive would be attributed to/abjected onto another group. Better then, to take the side of discontent against civilization.”²⁴⁵ According to Edelman, “the only queerness that queer sexualities could ever hope to claim would spring from their determined opposition to this underlying structure of the political.”²⁴⁶ It is the “impossible project” that “would oppose itself to the structural determinants of politics as such, which is also to say, that would oppose itself to the logic of opposition.”²⁴⁷ Hence, we arrive at Edelman’s queer negativity. This institutes a notion of ‘queer temporality’ in contradistinction to a temporality that is reproductive. Queer time for Edelman is thus encapsulated in his embrace of ‘no future’ and the forceful dismissal of “the social order and the figural children paraded before us.”²⁴⁸ As he writes “fuck Annie; fuck the waif from *Lez Miz*, fuck the poor innocent kid on the ‘Net; fuck Laws both with capital ‘l’s and with small; fuck the whole network of symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop.”²⁴⁹

²⁴⁴ K-punk (Mark Fisher). (2005). “We Aren’t the World.” From <http://k-punk.abstractdynamics.org/archives/005071.html>

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Edelman (1998), 22.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, 19.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 29.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

In thinking through a liberatory temporal structure through which we might engage a revised politics of mixed race, I will not suggest the political route of ‘no future’ á la Edelman. The destruction of the social order does not have to amount to a destruction of time as such; it is surely, however a destruction of reproductive time. Instead of rejecting the future wholesale, I argue for a revised understanding of the present and its relation to ‘past’ and ‘future’ in refiguring a liberatory temporal structure.

Like Edelman, José Muñoz shares the critique of reproductive futurity, but he does not concede the political and network of symbolic relations to the sociality of the heteronormative order; rather, he offers a complex vision of queerness in its radical potentiality of upending the current social order through its “structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present.”²⁵⁰ Queerness exceeds the logic of reproductive futurity and the structuring impulses of normative heterosexuality. “Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing.”²⁵¹ Muñoz quips at Edelman’s “romances of the negative,” suggesting that instead of embracing queerness as negativity, we understand queerness’s domain as the future, as that which provides resources for critiquing what he calls ‘straight time’ in ways that does not ‘give up’ the future or the political as such. Muñoz envisions a “queer futurity” that is performative and phenomenologically grounded in a continual critique of the present and a movement outside of/away from the ‘here and now.’ “The present is not enough” as he states, and queers and others abjected from dominant sociality

²⁵⁰ José Esteban Muñoz. (2009). *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York University Press: New York, NY, 1.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

and temporality perhaps feel this most acutely.²⁵² It is this concrete and contextualized experience that Muñoz wants to affirm in his articulation of the critical hermeneutic of queerness.

Muñoz stakes a qualified claim against Edelman, stating “as strongly as I reject reproductive futurity, I nonetheless refuse to give up on concepts such as politics, hope, and a future that is not kid stuff.”²⁵³ He does this in part through his articulation of ‘straight time’ as an “always already flawed temporality” that continually *misses* something. Akin to reproductive futurism, “straight time” is the “overarching temporal and spatial organization of the world” that “tells us that there is no future but the here and now of our everyday life.”²⁵⁴ It is an “autonaturalizing temporality” that promises futurity only in the form of “the reproductive majoritarian heterosexuality, the spectacle of the state refurbishing its ranks through overt and subsidized acts of reproduction.”²⁵⁵ This is the dominant temporal mode of our social order: a biological and social reproductive heteronormativity that engages in the control, organization, and legitimation of patterns of interpersonal, familial, and nation-based (amongst other) forms of relating and belonging.

While Edelman might view ‘straight time’ as the all governing reproductive futurism that mandates one to be ‘on the side of the child,’ Muñoz critiques the universalism of this claim, expressing how the assumption of the functioning of the image of the Child as the basis for politics and thus any visions of the future is enacted only for select subject positions, particularly the “universal-white-gay-man” that Muñoz believes underpins Edelman’s project. As Muñoz writes,

Theories of queer temporality that fail to factor in the relational relevance of race or class merely reproduce a crypto-universal white gay subject that is weirdly atemporal—which is to say a subject whose time is a restricted and restricting hollowed-out present free of

²⁵² Ibid, 27.

²⁵³ Ibid, 92.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 21-22.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

the need for the challenge of imagining a futurity that exists beyond the self or the here and now.²⁵⁶

The time of the present is a time that is already ‘no future’ for the oppressed such that one doesn’t need the triumphant shriek of the litany of fucks Edelman gives in order to radically embrace queer negativity. Muñoz’s locus of envisioning is one that is thick in the mess of phenomenological realities rather than the abstracted Lacanian psychoanalytic system. Drawing on critical theorists such as Ernst Bloch, Muñoz maintains hope in the face of this catastrophe because it is precisely hope in the future that has been structurally blocked for oppressed populations in the first place. It is important, then, for Muñoz to not “hand over futurity to normative white reproductive futurity” and instead develop “a utopian political imagination that will enable us to glimpse another time and place: a ‘not-yet’ where queer youths of color actually get to grow up.”²⁵⁷ While Muñoz does admit that Edelman’s figure of the Child is not to be coded as actual, historical *children*, he nonetheless claims that this “monolithic figure” is “always already white.”²⁵⁸

In attending to the thickness of the everyday and the concrete realities oppressed classes face, we cannot afford to have an understanding of the present as merely transition—whether that is as transition to a future that overcomes the past or a transition to ‘no future.’ As Benjamin describes, we need a notion of the present as one in which time has come to a halt; this is the time of revolutionary praxis, or what for my purposes I am calling liberatory temporality. This present is not a resting place either, however, but a shock, a violent upending of the social order in the form of an experience with history (the past) that, in its constellation of tensions, as Benjamin describes, yields a “shock to the same.” The experience of thinking historically is not about naming or representing a chain of events that happened ‘in the past’ but a manner of engagement with the

²⁵⁶ Ibid, 94.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, 96.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 95.

past that produces a ‘here-and-now,’ a momentary, but profound rupture that shows us the extent of the break *necessary* for instituting a new world. It does not itself herald that new world. Reproductive futurity *claims* the future in the form of a specific future—one that is assumed to be more progressive, emancipatory, and salvific, but in doing so, the status quo is reproduced and ‘the future’ continually deferred. *Liberatory* futurity thus ought to ward against this impulse to claim a specific future. This *includes*, I want to suggest, claiming the ‘no future.’ As Sara Ahmed helpfully reminds us, one may become so pessimistic *in principle* that one affords a certain optimism about pessimism itself. As Ahmed writes, “While the cheerful optimist can overlook suffering by looking on the bright side, seeing fullness instead of emptiness everywhere, so too the pessimist can empty this emptiness of harmful content by seeing emptiness as already there, before anything can happen.”²⁵⁹

Edelman’s ‘politics’ is one that is emptied of historical-political contingency and a historico-political context. I agree here with Ahmed when she notes, “Queer pessimism matters as a pessimism *about* a certain kind of optimism, as a refusal to be optimistic about “the right things” in the right kind of way.”²⁶⁰ Refusing *everything* refuses the *power* of refusal. It neutralizes its import and so diminishes its effects, whether we call these effects ‘political,’ ‘social,’ or ‘psychic,’ ‘libidinal.’

There are three key differences I want to draw out between reproductive temporalities and liberatory temporalities and they regard the tripartite terminology of time—past, present, and future. When it comes to the ‘past,’ reproductive temporality envisions the past as a sequential chain of events that build upon one another to advance us toward an ever-perfecting future;

²⁵⁹ Sara Ahmed. (2011). “Happy Futures, Perhaps.” In *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*. Edited by E.L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen. State University of New York Press: New York, NY, 171.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 161.

liberatory temporality, on the other hand, sees the contradictions and complexities of the past in their *inability* to provide a coherent narrative and in so doing forces us to reckon with that which *doesn't make sense*. That is, seen from the situation of the oppressed, one refuses a straightforward tale of history and instead makes space for understanding the grand mess of it all, as an irreducible heap of world-historical happenings. The 'present,' then, must be experienced quite differently in liberatory than in reproductive temporality. In the latter, the present is positioned as a transition, as a vehicle racing unobstructed towards the future. In the former, the present is a point of rupture, a "shock to the same" that destroys previous assumptions about the necessity of the current social order. And finally, reproductive temporalities stake a claim on the future in the form of an object to be taken, owned, occupied, or otherwise asserted as something given and graspable. I think here of witnessing signs with the triumphant statement "own the future," which was used to spark interest and investment (both monetary and symbolic) in the development of a new sports arena in downtown Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Liberatory temporalities *reject* this figuring of 'the future' as graspable, claimable, ownable. Instead, the future is fundamentally an orientation, paradoxically perhaps, to the past and present, reconfigured. It is not forward dawning in the sense of facing away from or leaving behind a past or present; rather, it is about constructing a different present through the possibilities of futures opened up in a radical engagement with the past.

VI. Queering the Reproduction of the Mixed Race 'Family'

By way of conclusion I want to apply these ideas to a politics of mixed race concerning the family by thinking more 'queerly' about the notion of inheritance and how we might 're-orient' ourselves to the past for the purposes of invigorating a radical presentism. I engage Sara Ahmed's

work on what she calls ‘mixed orientations,’ articulating its potential for manifesting a politics according to a more liberatory temporal structure. By emphasizing the politicality of ‘the family’ itself, I argue, we can appeal to ‘the past,’ and its generation of incoherencies and irruptions, as very much alive in the structures of the present.

Race has tended to be one element acting as the ‘glue’ for assumptions about what constitutes ‘family.’ Race is thought to be something inherited *through* the family and reproduction of the (racial) family unit. Mixed race, as is commonly advanced, supposedly challenges this assumption by challenging notions of the ‘pure’ racial family—the white family, the Asian family, the Latino family, the black family. But as shown, in doing so, it reinscribes the heteronormativity of the family and the biologization of race through an acceptance of a reproductive temporal politics. A liberatory temporal politics of mixed race must reject this heteronormalization of the mixed race family and the reproductive temporalities informing it. How might mixedness be advanced not through the background of heterosexual biological reproduction but instead through attention to the ideological creation of family itself as it has been advanced according to heritable ‘likeness’?

The family form is extended through ‘race,’ as Ahmed notes: “Other members of the ‘same race’ become ‘like a family’ just as the family is defined in racial terms.” She continues, “The analogy works powerfully to produce a particular version of race *and* a matter of ‘shared attributes’. In everyday talk about family connections, likeness is a sign of inheritance; *to look like a family is to ‘look alike.’*”²⁶¹ ‘Races’ become seen as ‘families’ because of supposed likeness of appearance. One ‘inherits’ this ‘likeness’ and said likeness is reproduced.

²⁶¹ Ahmed (2014), 98.

Key to Ahmed's analysis, however, is the way 'inheritance' signals both reception and possession: "In a way, we convert what we received into possessions, a conversion that often hides the conditions of having received something."²⁶² As Ahmed writes, we receive "material possessions, or other kinds of objects, such as shared beliefs, or even a shared love for the ideal of the family, which reproduces the family as that which we wish to reproduce."²⁶³ However, in staying with the doubleness of inheritance, as both the act of receiving and possessing, we can think about the ways in which 'likeness' becomes an *effect* of the degree to which one both receives *and possess*, rather than just the static result of assumed inheritance. Ahmed provides the language of 'orientation' in order to rethink inheritance. We "*inherit the reachability of some objects*" within the familial space and the ease with which those objects are reached covers over the *work* of possession by making it seem "*as if [what is inherited] was a shared attribute,*" simply by the act of reception.²⁶⁴ We inherit certain ways of being orientated and it is this that a politics of 'mixed race' and 'the family' ought to illuminate *so that* we might engage in the labor of orientating ourselves otherwise.

In developing the instability within the concept of 'inheritance', the question becomes: what happens when something received is not so easily converted into a possession? Ahmed considers what her failed inheritance of or failed orientation around whiteness as a 'mixed race' (British and Pakistani) child could signify, given the "gap" that unfolds between the "reception and possession" of her whiteness. In this experience, according to Ahmed, the logic of possession breaks down. If the logic of whiteness and white supremacy is furthered via modes of possession wherein one is thought to receive and possess whiteness as it is generated, passed on, and

²⁶² Ibid, 99.

²⁶³ Ibid, 99.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 100; Ahmed considers whiteness in this way. An orientation of whiteness puts certain things in reach: physical objects, but also "styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, even worlds" (100).

maintained through the ‘white family,’ then a liberatory politics of mixedness would need to challenge modes of possession via inheritance through its development. Instead of mixedness as a static *result*: one is mixed if X (and often X involves notions of ancestral inheritance), we can imagine mixedness as an orientation, one that Ahmed describes as “unfold[ing] from the gap between reception and possession” of familial racial belonging.

There are, however, some problems with Ahmed’s assessment. It does seem to implicitly be situated in the experiences of families we would already identify as ‘mixed’ or ‘multiracial,’ rather than challenging those assumptions from the outset. She assumes her mixed raceness and the experience of a ‘gap’ given her inability to possess whiteness. But I want to broaden Ahmed’s theoretical interventions to the notion of any conceptually ‘purifying’ qualification to ‘family,’ and this includes notions of the ‘mixed’ or ‘multiracial’ family that are assumed via the existence of (biological) parents of different races. In thinking inheritance in the double way Ahmed suggests, we can understand the fundamental ways in which the notion of family itself is challenged. In recognizing the *work* and *labor* that goes into producing the sign of the family we can make transparent its political nature and we can simultaneously make apparent its emergence from and operation within the historical social order inaugurated by the transatlantic slave trade. As discussed in the introduction, this order generates political relations whereby cultural intelligibility, integrity, legibility is offered via a system that distorts and displaces human social and cultural features of relations amongst racialized populations. A ‘mixed orientation’ would not be a matter of the *experience* of ‘failing to inherit/possess whiteness’ but one of recognizing and making transparent that gap between reception and possession of any racial lineage including what we might unreflectively identify as ‘mixed’ and the possibilities that are opened therein for

developing ways of relating outside the vertical line assumed in discourses on ‘inheritance,’ ‘progress,’ and futurity.

I suggest we think of a now-self-reflective understanding of the labor involved in ‘possessing’ one’s ‘inheritance’ as orientating us not toward the future—where we can claim a mixed race position or multiracial family as the harbinger of social change—but extending to the past. Benjamin speaks of the “only writer of history with the gift of setting alight the sparks of hope in the past” as the “one who is convinced...that not even the dead will be safe from the enemy, if he is victorious,” and as the continued manifestation of this historical social order proves, he has not “ceased to be victorious.”²⁶⁵ The dominance of reproductive temporality demands a politics of continued deferment; it is the *future* that will redeem us in the form of generations to come. This demands looking away from the past and toward this always-elusive future *to come*. Reproductive politics of temporality, as Benjamin describes, has “contented itself with assigning the working-class the role of the savior of *future* generations...[and] thereby severed the sinews of its greatest power.”²⁶⁶ As Benjamin goes on to state, “Through this schooling the class forgot its hate as much as its spirit of sacrifice. For both nourish themselves on the picture of enslaved forebears, not on the ideal of the emancipated heirs.”²⁶⁷ We can substitute here the class of ‘mixed race’ people and families for ‘the working-class’ in order to consider the racial politics of reproductive temporality. Following Tavia Nyong’o, I suggest that we “take Benjamin quite literally” when we consider whether we are “better served by the ideal of grandchildren liberated

²⁶⁵ Benjamin (1940), VI.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, XII.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

into a postracial future or by a spirit of sacrifice nourished by the hatred of racism and racial slavery.”²⁶⁸

Attention ought to be paid in the present to the system of sexualized violence and exploitation of reproductive labor that gave rise to the problematic of racial definition, description, and familial belonging within liberatory politics today. Nyong’o suggests a mode of remembrance through what he calls “negative heritage.” Instead of ‘remembering’ the past à la Root’s description of our racial past as a ‘relic’ that is over and done with, we might engage more in the spirit of Benjamin’s ‘hatred’ by developing “a dialectical image revealing how, as Benjamin puts it, every document of civilization is at the same time a document of barbarism, but not exclusively.”²⁶⁹ This sentiment of ‘negative heritage’ can be modeled off the spirit of placards stating ‘your heritage is my slavery!’ in response to arguments that the confederate flag is a statement of ‘heritage’ rather than ‘hate.’ Negative heritage, as Nyong’o describes, “does not abandon a hope of futurity, but that futurity is not the social democratic hope of gradual inclusion and improvement, but of the cataclysmic irruption, from within empty, homogenous time, of the messianic time with which Benjamin ends his meditations.”²⁷⁰

One arena wherein we might bear witness to such an irruption is via attention to what might be called ‘queer’ or ‘nonreproductive’ lines of affiliation that can be found in radical black and feminist theorization. James Bliss, in “Hope Against Hope: Queer Negativity, Black Feminist Theorizing, and Reproduction without Futurity,” argues that we ought to “account for those modes of reproduction that are not future-oriented, the children who do not register as such, and the ‘families’ that are not granted the security of nuclear bonds” suggesting that “we might find in this

²⁶⁸ Nyong’o. (2009). *Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN, 163, 164.

²⁶⁹ Ibid, 164.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

reproduction without futurity...an opportunity to develop a politics of position that inhabits the incoherence of Black reproduction.”²⁷¹ This “queer capacity of Blackness to reproduce without being productive” is instructive for outlining liberatory thought and politics capable of reckoning with “the sort of epistemological violence necessary to undo a social order.”²⁷²

A few terms of Bliss’s deserve unpacking here. ‘Blackness’ or ‘the Black’ names not a “sociological or identity category distinct from gender and sexuality” but rather the “relations of force of ‘New World’ chattel slavery, not a form of social or cultural particularity.”²⁷³ In the transmission of bodies across the ocean, the transatlantic slave trade inducted a new historical-symbolic order, as Spillers describes, wherein Blackness emerged as/from the conglomeration of “social and political tactics for ordering bodies and desires that always already exceed categorization”²⁷⁴; It is in this way that coherence is ‘lost’ for categories such as race, gender, and sexuality. Hortense Spillers in particular refers to this as the ‘ungendering’ of the subject position of ‘black woman’ (and, arguably, black men). ‘*Gendering*,’ Spillers contends, is a process unfolding within the “confines of the domestic” and “spreads its tentacles for male and female subject over a wider ground of human and social purposes.”²⁷⁵ It is a domesticity that “gains its power” from the patronymic, or the Name of the Father—locating, naming, and covering persons in a space of cultural intelligibility, granting ‘symbolic integrity’ to a host of human social and cultural arrangements.²⁷⁶ These arrangements were organized *through* and around the specific

²⁷¹ James Bliss. (2015). “Hope Against Hope: Queer Negativity, Black Feminist Theorizing, and Reproduction without Futurity.” *Mosaic*. 48.1, 86.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid, 88.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Hortense J. Spillers. (1987). “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book.” *Diacritics*. 17.2, 72.

²⁷⁶ “‘Gendering’ takes place in the confines of the domestic, an essential metaphor that then spreads its tentacles for male and female subject over a wider ground of human and social purposes. Domesticity appears to gain its power by way of a common origin of cultural fictions that are grounded in the specificity of proper names, more exactly, a patronymic, which, in turn, situates those persons it ‘covers’ in a particular place. Contrarily, the cargo of a ship might not be regarded as elements of the domestic, even though the vessel that carries it is sometimes romantically

ruptures of humanity inaugurated by the slave trade, such that black/slave ‘reproduction,’ ‘gender,’ ‘kinship,’ etc. was made to serve this Patronymic Patriarchal order of social relations.

Orlando Patterson’s discussion of ‘natal alienation’ illustrates further the “incoherence that accrues around Black filiation.”²⁷⁷ That is, “the slave’s forced alienation, the loss of ties of birth in both ascending and descending generations.”²⁷⁸ Patterson describes the slave as such:

He was truly a genealogical isolate. Formally isolated in his social relations with those who lived, he also was culturally isolated from the social heritage of his ancestors.... Slaves differed from other human beings in that they were not allowed freely to integrate the experience of their ancestors into their lives, to inform their understanding of social reality with the inherited meanings of their natural forbears, or to anchor the living present in any conscious community of memory.²⁷⁹

To be sure, those enslaved *did* form meaningful bonds but these were formed in the context of a sociohistorical symbolic and institutional structure that continually sought to foreclose them, thus granting no conceptual integrity to these relations. The question, then, as Bliss poses, is “What does reproduction mean for a ‘genealogical isolate’?” There is something generative about this state and it lies in part through an understanding of Blackness as that which “disrupts the capacity for these categories [gender, sexuality, race] to form a body.”²⁸⁰ This is what ought to be recalled in opposition to any present day engagement that produces ‘mixed race’ and the ‘mixed family’ as representable through heterosexual norms of inclusion and biological reproduction.

The gap between reception and possession in discussions of familial inheritance points to this historical (negative) heritage and reopens the past for purposes of generating the possibility of new forms of relating and belonging in the present. In situating a politics in the present through an

(ironically?) personified as ‘she.’ The human cargo of a slave vessel—in the fundamental effacement and remission of African family and proper names—offers a *counter*-narrative to notions of the domestic” (72)

²⁷⁷ Bliss (2015), 85.

²⁷⁸ Orlando Patterson. (1982). *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 7.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 5.

²⁸⁰ Bliss (2015), 88.

engagement with the past, we can draw historical continuities that generates “the past in a parallax view with the present, establish[ing] a friction rather than a fusion, a clash rather than a harmonization” that yields a ‘shock to the same’ within discourses of the multiracial family.²⁸¹ What if mixedness sought to make connections to *this* history—of non-reproductive kinship—in order to foreground a politics in/of the present? We don’t know the stories that we might tell about family-reconceived via a recognition of its fundamental gap between ‘reception’ to ‘possession’ but recognizing the gap opens up the possibilities of different ways of suturing it, producing different political relations—outside normative heterosexuality and reproductive temporalities—in the process.

²⁸¹ Nyong’o (2009), 165.

Chapter 4
‘Interracial Intimacy’ and ‘Responsible’ Multiracial Politics: Refusing the Assumptions
Informing Sundstrom’s Ethics of Repair

In a 2017 *New York Times* editorial entitled “How Interracial Love is Saving America,” law professor Sheryll Cashin argues that those who pursue interracial relationships today—what she calls ‘ardent integrators’—are “motivated by love and are our greatest hope for racial understanding.”²⁸² These ardent integrators are primarily whites who cross color lines and learn to “value and empathize with African-Americans and other minorities,” in the process developing “cultural dexterity,” or the “enhanced capacity for intimate connections with people outside their own tribe.”²⁸³ Cashin concludes with the following extravagant claim: “culturally dexterous people may be our only hope for disrupting hoary race scripts.”²⁸⁴ That is, whites that cross the color line and learn to love those ‘outside their tribe’ will, in effect, solve racism. This abundantly hopeful editorial ends with the claim that these culturally dexterous whites could bring about the ‘third Reconstruction.’ While the reference to reconstruction as a time of great hope and sociopolitical transformation is clear, the author forgets that historically, ‘reconstructions’ have not ‘inevitably’ unfolded nor did they come to manifest strictly vertical progress. That is, individuals underwent violent, concrete struggle during reconstruction while the period following involved vast rollbacks on rights, status, and protection for minorities.²⁸⁵

²⁸² Sheryll Cashin. (2017). “How Interracial Love is Saving America.” *New York Times*. From <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/03/opinion/sunday/how-interracial-love-is-saving-america.html>

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois. (1903). *The Souls of Black Folk*. Ed. by Stanley Appelbaum (1994). Dover Publications: Mineola, NY.

We might call Cashin’s position the ‘naïve position’ when it comes to the role of interraciality²⁸⁶ in challenging racial oppression in the U.S. Though naïve, it is not unlike most ‘liberal’ or ‘progressive’ minded people in the U.S.—those who believe that “growing interracial intimacy” and “demographic and generational change”²⁸⁷ will prompt radical social and political transformation. Philosopher Ronald Sundstrom provides a more complex analysis of what he terms ‘multiracial lives’ and ‘interracial intimacies’ and their relation to visions of social justice while working within the frame of political liberalism. He rightly articulates that “Interracial love does not replace justice; interracial intimacy does not answer the call for greater distributive justice, nor does it necessarily result in the equal recognition of a common humanity between racial and ethnic groups.”²⁸⁸ The existence of interraciality or multiraciality *itself* does nothing by way of manifesting positive social transformation and so we must begin from this position and continually reiterate it. Sundstrom’s work is exemplary in this regard. And yet, I want to push back on some of his claims. In this chapter, I will explore Sundstrom’s *The Browning of America and the Evasion of Social Justice*, particularly focusing on his positive project of understanding how interracial intimacies and multiracial lives ought to play a role in the re-envisioning of social justice that Sundstrom argues is provoked by the browning of America.

Sundstrom situates his work in the contemporary context wherein the ‘browning of America’ or the “rapid increase in Latino, Asian American, and mixed-race populations”²⁸⁹ has led us to a sociopolitical and ethical juncture. As Sundstrom rightly identifies, “the process of browning may be a demographic fact, but that it is not by itself politically or morally

²⁸⁶ I use this term to describe a broad arrangement of what we typically call ‘interracial relationships’ which can include everyday encounters between people of different races (what we might call, ‘race relations’), chosen friend or romantic interpersonal relationships, familial arrangements wherein individuals are of different races, etc.

²⁸⁷ Cashin, (2017).

²⁸⁸ Ronald R. Sundstrom. (2008). *The Browning of America and the Evasion of Social Justice*. State University of New York Press: New York, NY, 7.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 4.

significant.”²⁹⁰ We are faced then with the question of *how* the browning of America might transform our notions of racial justice and harmony. As Sundstrom writes, “The groups that make up the browning of America...can seriously embrace antiracism, or they can fail in their moral obligations by transforming the monster of racism in the United States from a single black-white beast into a brown multiheaded hydra.”²⁹¹

Sundstrom is critical of both claims from the ‘left’ and ‘right’ that refuse the move away from the ‘black-white binary’ (BwB). His main object of critique is thus the ‘black-white binary’ operative within scholarship pertaining to race and racism in the U.S. In many cases, as Kathryn Gines (Belle) writes, “the literature has focused on constructions of Blackness and whiteness in the United States to the neglect of other racial, ethnic, and diasporic categories such as Hispanic, Latino/a, and Asian/Asian American identity formation” and so “[privileges] anti-Black racism and white supremacy as focal points for racial oppression without regard for other forms of oppression such as nativism, xenophobia, and even anthropocentrism.”²⁹² Sundstrom is critical of the BwB because, as he claims, “it does not engender accurate descriptions of the United States’ racial past or present, and it skews discussions of the future of race and racial justice toward the perspectives and interests of blacks and whites.”²⁹³ Without dismissing the claims for justice that often emerge *from* the reliance on the black-white binary, Sundstrom argues for visions of racial justice that exceed the limitations of this frame.

In what follows, I outline Sundstrom’s vision for the transformation of racial justice provoked by the browning of America, specifically attending to his claims concerning how we

²⁹⁰ Ibid, 7.

²⁹¹ Ibid, 6.

²⁹² Kathryn Gines (Belle). (2013). “Critical Philosophy of Race Beyond the Black/White Binary.” *Critical Philosophy of Race*. 1.1, 28.

²⁹³ Sundstrom (2008), 66.

ought to think about interracial intimacies and multiraciality in this frame. Broadly speaking, he seeks *recovery* of a U.S. national racial past that was ‘multiracial,’ leading to the development of an ‘ethos of *repair*’ that, he claims, ought to motivate a ‘responsible multiracial politics.’ Sundstrom turns to memory and history in order to trace a (disavowed) historical continuity of multiracialism that challenges what he identifies as the myths of a monoracial nation. While it is surely laudable to seek the telling of history that seems to refuse being heard, I argue that the way Sundstrom engages in this project is problematic because it does not adequately historicize the continuity of racial domination in the U.S. and the role ‘interracial intimacies’ and ‘multiracial lives’ have played in this regard. As I argue, a responsible multiracial politics would not include a recuperation of an interraciality or multiraciality understood to have been *veiled* historically, but a historical encounter based in the *refusal* of the grounds of sense that inform the ways in which we use these racial terms today. In what follows, I will first outline Sundstrom positive project, which includes a critique of the BwB and a recuperation of familial and national memory. I will then identify the ways in which I am critical of the underlying assumptions of Sundstrom’s project.

I. Sundstrom’s Positive Project: Recovery and Repair

In this section, I outline the positive project emergent from Sundstrom’s critique of the BwB and what he identifies as its pitfalls in addressing the problem of racial oppression, especially in an increasingly diverse world. First, I’ll briefly articulate his critique of the BwB. Sundstrom offers six versions of the binary and critiques their limitations. These can be divided loosely as *descriptive* and *prescriptive* versions of the binary. Descriptive versions of the binary would include the Historical, Empirical, and Methodological. The Historical version stages the historical

relationship between black and white identity in the U.S. as the historical fact from which we must proceed and which informs all other versions of the binary. The Empirical version assumes that race patterns can be described through ‘black’ and ‘white’ while the Methodological version focuses on blacks, whites, and their interrelation as a method through which to understand race. The latter three versions Sundstrom identifies are primarily prescriptive and it is these that I will focus on because they most clearly relate to his critique of the binary for purposes of re-visioning racial justice in the U.S. Overall, the prescriptive version of the binary begin with the assumption that black and white pick out prescriptive patterns of racial organization. As he states,

This version accords with the view of the majority of the proponents of the black-white binary. They do not claim that the binary provides a demographic description but that it describes *prescriptive* patterns of racial hierarchical organization. These patterns, which derive from America’s history of race, organize the complexities of ethnic and racial experiences into the American ‘bipolar schema,’ and in this schema racial groups are politically either included as whites or excluded as blacks.²⁹⁴

Sundstrom’s main critique against this understanding of the binary is that black-white is taken to too strongly determine the “function, meaning, and role” of “an amorphous and enormous middle group” who does not fit into black or white categories. The underlying assumption, as he describes is that “in the United States, the categories ‘Latino,’ ‘Asian American,’ and ‘Native American’ must have the normative status of either ‘white’ or ‘black’” which too reductively understands an array of racial and racist genealogies.²⁹⁵ The problem with “Taking seriously the claim that the binary names prescriptive patterns of racial organization” is that it “discount[s] the particularity of each nonwhite, nonblack group during deliberations about the broad dynamics of race. In that space, in public forums such as national conversations about race, according to the partisans of the black-white binary, there are only black and white folks.”²⁹⁶ The limitations of the BwB is perhaps

²⁹⁴ Ibid, 71.

²⁹⁵ Ibid, 75.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

not primarily so much in that it completely *occludes* but that it doesn't do enough to complexly *illuminate* the workings of race and racism in the U.S. and so limits our visions of racial justice. As Sundstrom makes clear, "Any discussion of race that ignored the fundamental nature of the obsession over blackness in American life would be dishonest and, given the American history of anti-black racism, irresponsible."²⁹⁷ The binary helps illuminate this. But as a totalizing discourse, it limits further illumination.

One arena in which Sundstrom explores the potential to transform meanings of racial justice and to transform the limitations of the BwB is within the realm of interracial intimacy. While Sundstrom resists visions of what he calls a "multiracial narcissism of a future messianic totality...that within its light brown face all of the conflicts of history are finally, and beautifully, resolved"²⁹⁸ he does not abandon the idea that interracial intimacies are indeed an element of an ideal social polity. Particularly, situating his claims within the framework of political liberalism, he suggests that if we take seriously "liberal conceptions of the state and international polity" such as liberty, autonomy, free association, etc., then the "inevitable" result is "interracial and interethnic amalgamation."²⁹⁹ As he writes, "Interracial intimate relationships—from casual romances to adoption—are done in the face of racisms at all levels and go against the grain of racist social mores to limit such liberty."³⁰⁰ He furthermore suggests "this expression of liberty presents ethical challenges to family and community obligations that are asserted for the sake (in the best instances) of the progress and protection of communities that have been racially oppressed."³⁰¹ His claim is that in taking seriously the 'browning of America,' we need to

²⁹⁷ Ibid, 84.

²⁹⁸ Ibid, 107.

²⁹⁹ Ibid, 101.

³⁰⁰ Ibid, 103.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

recognize that racial groupings will necessarily transform, which will thus transform visions of forward-looking social justice. At base, as he argues, the browning of America will and should challenge assumptions about “monoracial representations and communities.”³⁰²

Sundstrom is critical of what we might call ‘classical’ depictions of ‘racial harmony’ and ‘diversity’ that are “thought to be consistent with the conservation of traditional communities and identities.”³⁰³ This is what he calls the ‘popular’ vision of racial justice, “since the heyday of the civil rights movement”³⁰⁴: the idea that what racial justice demands is ‘improved relations’ that leave intact and untransformed those categories that are to be ‘related.’ But as Sundstrom argues, “[these] conceptions are out of touch with the sheer demographic power of the browning of America.”³⁰⁵ The growth of a “multiracial society” has implications for the “private sphere” such that ‘racial harmony,’ according to Sundstrom can no longer mean “separate communities living in ‘harmony’ with each other and conserving their communities and cultures.”³⁰⁶ Rather, it means the recognition of a more robust and deeply transformative “mixed blood,” multiracial nation: “Thomas Jefferson’s worst nightmare,” as he describes it.³⁰⁷

In what ways might the browning of America radically transform how we ought to conceive of racial justice? Sundstrom conjectures that as more whites marry nonwhites, the system of reward for whites that accords through the reproduction of the white family will crumble. Sundstrom advances the claim that “racial privileges afforded to some whites” through a “white family privilege that is pegged to notions of white superiority, purity, and privilege” might very well be dismantled since the growth of ‘interracial families’ would “make the very idea of a white

³⁰² Ibid, 106.

³⁰³ Ibid, 7.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid, 8.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

family nonsensical.”³⁰⁸ If “families [could] no longer be thought of and valued as white,” Sundstrom argues, “the implications...are tremendous...[as] the dismantling pressures on white families would necessarily affect other racially and ethnically exclusive identities.”³⁰⁹

Sundstrom’s ‘hope’ in interracial intimacies is not in those relationships *themselves*, but what they could provoke by way of dismantling standard patterns of racial naming and racial valuing. He argues that the State’s job is at base to “promote “stable, loving, and productive—in the widest sense—relationships that nurture and produce just, moral, healthy, productive, and civically engaged citizens” and as part of this plan, “[it] has an interest in tearing down the veil of lies and illusions that has propogated the myth and demands for a monoracial state and family.”³¹⁰ It is important to acknowledge what Sundstrom is *not* saying here. He is not saying that the state has a role directly in producing interracial intimacies such that for example it might ‘reward’ interracial relationships, but that, if the ideal of the liberal state is taken seriously, to the extent that the state has the obligation to promote healthy and productive relationships that nurture and produce healthy and productive citizens, it has an obligation to engage in the promotion of a historical corrective. That is, it is tasked with “admitting and celebrating” what Sundstrom calls the “multiracial and ethnic origins of the state.”³¹¹ Here is where Sundstrom’s turn to historical recuperation becomes salient for his goals of revisioning present day conceptions of racial justice given transformation of the patterns of organization we currently use for describing race and racial relations in the U.S.

³⁰⁸ Ibid, 103.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid, 105.

³¹¹ Ibid.

Sundstrom argues that it is important to “tear down the veil of lies and illusions...of a monoracial state ” and to recuperate the history of a “multiracial nation.”³¹² The example he uses for this recuperation are the “nation’s forefathers, and lawgivers... [as] fathers, although compromised and failed ones who were caught up in racial-sexual denial, of actual multiracial families” and “of a multiracial United States.”³¹³ I understand Sundstrom’s motivations here to be informed by the necessity and importance of acknowledging histories that have been systematically ignored, refused, and dismissed. This is important to note, but the question I want to ask is: what is at stake in calling these histories ‘multiracial’ and “admitting and celebrating” them as a way to urge the state to promote liberty and autonomy regarding racial affiliation in the present? What are the unspoken ideological assumptions and myths in *this* formulation? I explore this further in the next section, but for now, I will move on to describing Sundstrom’s ‘ethos of repair’ for a ‘responsible multiracial politics.’

Sundstrom uses the language of rupture and repair in articulating the specific politics that ought to emerge from a serious engagement with U.S. racial history and the recognition and growth of a multiracial society. Because past representations of “multiracial families” and of a “multiracial nation” have been cast out, suppressed, and/or veiled according to Sundstrom and done so in a way that emphasized their pathology or degeneracy, the role of a “responsible multiracial politics” in the present comes by way of repairing these “errors.”³¹⁴ As he states, “Multiracial lives have been living signs of the profound errors of all racial systems in their vain attempt to categorize, sort,

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Ibid,

³¹⁴ Ibid, 109.

order, and control.”³¹⁵ He goes on to claim that “Multiracial lives were from the first days of modern race theories *ruptures* of racial mores, and they remain so at some social sites today.”³¹⁶

For Sundstrom, multiracialism must be understood as an *experience*: “Multiracial persons find themselves born into a world riven by racial fault lines, a situation they frequently feel they carry within their bodies and identities.”³¹⁷ Multiracial people have “specific experiences of being born into, and living among, the gaps of racial and ethnic categories,” Sundstrom argues, and it is these ‘gaps’ produced by the ‘ruptures’ of race as it is “imagined to designate deep, permanent, and impermeable barriers between varieties of peoples” that ought to be ‘repaired.’³¹⁸ As “living symbols of the rupture of racial-sexual mores and divisions,”³¹⁹ multiracial individuals have a particular relation to these ruptures. In a present day situation in which multiracial identity and politics is advanced as a “rebellion against monoracialism,” Sundstrom argues that “Multiracial persons, and the movement that claims to look after their interests, have special obligations that are rooted in the very experience that leads individuals to claim this identity: their obligation to memory.”³²⁰ The way towards reparative justice, Sundstrom argues, is through the demands of memory, or more collectively, perhaps, the demands of historical recuperation of “our mothers.”³²¹ Sundstrom turns to the site of familial belonging to ground a “responsible and reparative multiracial politics.”³²² We must “affirm the obligations that multiracial persons have to the memories of their mothers” according to Sundstrom, because refusing to do so “is a repetition of the ruptures of interracial intimacy marking the history of race and multiracialism.”³²³ It appears

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid, 109, emphasis mine.

³¹⁷ Ibid, 125.

³¹⁸ Ibid, 111.

³¹⁹ Ibid, 116.

³²⁰ Ibid, 110.

³²¹ Ibid, 127.

³²² Ibid, 129.

³²³ Ibid.

that Sundstrom describes the particular phenomenological experience of multiraciality—as being *birthed* into this society—as that which generates the “special obligation” multiracial individuals have “to the memory of [their] mothers [that] links [them] to obligations to the memories of [their] African American, Asian, Latina, Native American, and Anglo grandmothers to their and their children’s welfare.”³²⁴ In positioning multiraciality and multiracial individuals as the sites of rupture of ongoing racial mores and divisions, Sundstrom understands that these ruptures “are alive, for better or worse, in all of our families and communities” and arises in “stories, at once personal, familial, and social, [that result] in a variety of personal choices: from the most painful of passing to the contemporary declaration of multiracialism.”³²⁵ It is these sites, Sundstrom argues, to which multiracial politics must respond through the work repair.

Demands of memory, or more collectively, perhaps, demands of historical recuperation, ought to “lead [multiracial persons] to seek repair” but they also “demand that multiracialism contribute to the repair of damage wrought by racism,”³²⁶ according to Sundstrom. He makes clear that the turn to ‘repair’ ought not be individually-psycho-socially based, as perhaps too many articulations of the goals of multiracial politics have been. As he suggests instead, “Turning to the idea of repair as an organizing principle for multiracial identity helps transform the discussion of multiracialism from individualist to communal, political, and social. Repair is about self, among others.”³²⁷ And so, multiracialism is central to future visions of racial justice in the U.S. because it “marks the boundaries of *what* needs restoration”—the “central myths about the birth of our nation” as a ‘monoracial’ nation when it was indeed ‘multiracial’.³²⁸

³²⁴ Ibid, 130

³²⁵ Ibid, 116.

³²⁶ Ibid, 110.

³²⁷ Ibid, 127.

³²⁸ Ibid, emphasis mine.

II. Historicizing Sundstrom's Dehistoricization: Refusing the Logics Grounding a 'Recoverable' Multiraciality

a. The 'Being' of 'Multi'- and 'Mono'-Raciality

My criticism of Sundstrom arises through analysis of *how* he turns to history to accomplish the task of societal repair in the present. Additionally, I find that his articulation of the work of repair is problematically grounded in a notion of race and racism as cognitive *errors* that can be addressed via an 'unveiling' of the 'true' multiracial nation rather than as the deeper and more insidious features of the U.S. racial state itself. Once we recognize more fully the depths to which we remain in the grasp of oppressive logics, we can build better theoretical architecture to more radically confront the U.S. racial system of domination. This must begin, however, from refusing the grounds of sense that inform standard conceptions of race and mixed race as 'actual' as well as standard conceptions of challenging racism that rely on an 'unveiling' of the 'actual' arrangement of race in the U.S. as *multi-racial*.

Sundstrom's positions, as I aim to show, problematically trade in assumptions about the 'being' of multiraciality and interraciality and its relation in respect to, what I find to be flattened and incomplete understandings of racism and what it takes to challenge racism. According to Sundstrom, we need to recognize the challenge to 'monoraciality' that 'multiraciality' brings, embracing its potential to challenge typical patterns of relationality and communal belonging. But this implicitly provides the idea that individuals *are* 'monoracial' or 'multiracial' and secondly, that multiraciality *follows* from the existence of monoraciality (e.g. the nation's forefathers were fathers of *actual* multiracial families, theoretically, because of two differently monoracial

individuals breeding). Sundstrom first has to presume a ‘monoraciality’ that is then transformed into ‘multiraciality’ and he is recouping *that* version of a multiracial society as the origin of America, which, I believe, fundamentally accepts certain logics of race that ought to be challenged.

For Sundstrom, interraciality and multiraciality operate in a mutually exclusive relation to ‘monoraciality,’ a term meant to refer to those who have a ‘singular’ racial background.³²⁹ Sundstrom implicitly categorically distinguishes individuals as monoracial or multiracial, and in so doing, I argue, upholds foundational fictions of race—that is, its construction of ‘purity’ and ‘impurity’ as societal givens that were manipulated for the purposes of a logic of racial domination mandating categorization. Take for example the following instances where Sundstrom separates the two terms: “Multiracial individuals” he says, “through their interactions with the forces of racialization and the network of existent racial projects, have a direct effect on monoracial lives.”³³⁰ Multiracial activists have long been advocating this distinction in order to draw attention to multiraciality as a distinct subject position, experience, and identity in need of recognition and “in rebellion against monoracialism.”³³¹ In his acceptance of this terminology so straightforwardly and in opposition to one another, we gain insight into the assumptions Sundstrom is making in his understanding of ‘multiracial’ and ‘interracial.’ Though the expressed purpose may be otherwise, the term ‘monoracial,’ used in contradistinction to ‘multiracial’ suggests the acceptance and enactment of race as a matter of categorical divisions, a primarily classificatory practice through which separation is manifest. In so doing it also accepts ‘purity’ and ‘impurity’ as on some level existent, identifiable, achievable. Monoraciality is meant to refer to any traditional category of

³²⁹ As Pearl Fuyo Gaskins describes it in *What Are You?: Voices of Mixed Race Young People* (1999), “Monoracial: A so-called racially ‘pure’ person; someone who identifies himself or herself as white, black, or Asian/Pacific Islander, for example” (12).

³³⁰ Sundstrom (2008), 128.

³³¹ *Ibid*, 109.

race—black, white, Asian, etc; all are thought to be similarly monoracial and problematic in their reliance on categorical purity. But in using monoracial as an antonym to multiracial, one merely reorganizes the categorial distinctions to a ‘higher’ level, accepting mono- and multi- as distinct racial categories of belonging. Monoracial is considered a category of persons, while similarly; ‘multiracial’ is considered a category of persons. Race is still (re)asserted through and as a classificatory schema—in this case, a class of monoracial and multiracial individuals.³³²

In using ‘multiracial’ in contradistinction to ‘monoracial,’ Sundstrom offers it as a replacement for what he calls the ‘monoracial mythologies’ of the state. But if ‘monoraciality’ is ultimately a myth, my claim is that so is ‘multiraciality.’ I am speaking on the conceptual level here, which has repercussions for how we understand the ‘actual.’ Properly historicized, ‘mixture’ and ‘purity’ in regards to race are two sides of the same white supremacist racializing coin. What I mean by this is that ‘race’ does not exist outside of its birth and negotiation within violent historical (and ongoing) projects of racialization that inflect all areas of life—political, social, libidinal, epistemological, perceptual, etc.—generating ways of being, knowing, and acting informed by the historical-social order inaugurated by the rupture(s) of the transatlantic slave trade. We need to center analysis on these processes of racialization in order to trace their continuities across the borders of terms *generated by these processes*.

Sundstrom seeks the recuperation of examples of multiraciality and interracial relationships for the purposes of placing these alongside present day examples of the same in order to trace a (disavowed) historical continuity that challenges the myth of the U.S. as a ‘monoracial’ nation. But he does so through an inherited language of ‘interracial’ and ‘multiracial’ that

³³² It is important to note here that this conceptual apparatus also diverts attention away from the structures of white supremacy and an interrogation of whiteness. Instead it ‘levels,’ conceptually, all ‘monoracial’ races, neutralizing the historical specificity of the category of whiteness in achieving and maintaining rights, status, material resources, etc. over other populations.

implicitly affirms notions of race as given groupings, prior to, or outside of colonial conquest and racial slavery. In relying on the historical ‘fact’ of a multiracial nation, Sundstrom eschews interrogation of the conceptual work of racializing projects past and present and their historical continuity. Systems of white supremacy and antiblackness involve a repertoire of discourses generating a system of meaning mandating the appearance of natural, self-evident, and unchanging racial groupings/distinctions as well as the dual fictions of racial mixture and racial purity.³³³

What is at stake in historical reclamations like Sundstrom’s? What allows one to claim a multiraciality that existed— as ‘*actual*’? This claim is accessible, I argue, through a logic *consistent* with patterns of racialization upholding systems of oppression. “Racial mixture” is posed as a ‘fact,’ something that is ‘actual.’ But the ‘fact’ of ‘actual’ mixture lends little to challenging the concept of race as birthed and maintained via a political ontology seeking to naturalize race *as* identifiable, codifiable, graspable, and as a matter of identity, subject position, or category in order to maintain racial dominance. Ultimately, recouping ‘actual’ mixedness or a ‘multiracial nation’ further participates in this naturalization rather than fundamentally challenging it. Sundstrom appeals to history in order to retrieve examples of multiracial families and interracial relationships but he does not historicize those examples themselves. I will turn next to this.

³³³ Desiree Valentine. (2016). “Racial Mixedness in the Contemporary United States and South Africa: On the Politics of Impurity and Antiracist Praxis.” *Critical Philosophy of Race*. 4.2.

Here, I argue “Purity and impurity were not simply a “given” that racists manipulated in order to satisfy their racist systems. Rather, purity and impurity are themselves constructs that are created through the interplay of a range of factors, be it social, economic, political, legal, scientific, religious, or philosophical. In general, we have tended to look back on this history of race and assume it has been organized primarily by biology and equate biology with laws of descent and whatever “fraction of blood” one might have, but this is only one factor that influenced (and continues to influence) racial categorization. This narrative relies on a flattened version of history and politics wherein only categorical purity constituted the history of race as a social and natural category of belonging. It *accepts* to an extent, then, the idea of race simply *as* “pure races.” However, the politics and history of race involved *practices* of purity that in turn formed purity as such. As a practice aimed at concealing its sociopolitically constituted genesis, these attempts relied on constant maintenance and reaffirmation and in a sense always *failed* in the production of a completely consistent and unchanging notion of race” (189-190).

b. Sundstrom's Use of Historical Examples

Acts of historical recuperation cannot simply retrieve instances of what dominant schemas might identify as 'interracial' or 'multiracial,' but must challenge the epistemological modes that make this type of recovery possible. In so doing, we can engage in liberatory praxis that alters our relationship to the past and future via a transformation of dominant sense-making.

Sundstrom proposes that in our turn to history to bolster claims about present day transformations of race and social justice, we ought to recognize and valorize the facts of a multiracial nation comprised of multiracial families, 'fathered' by the nation's lawmakers. He describes these forefathers and lawmakers as caught up in "racial-sexual denial," implicitly suggesting their failures as primarily a cognitive category mistake. Racial harmony in our contemporary sociopolitical sphere, as Sundstrom argues, is the further production of a "mixed-blood nation," which has until this point been a suppressed feature of national consciousness. This, he describes as "Thomas Jefferson's worst nightmare."³³⁴

But historical disavowal of naming relations as 'multiracial' or 'interracial' cannot simply be understood as a category mistake, but a matter of the manifestation of an ontology—one that is *political* in the sense that it is a matter of concrete historical practices and therefore can be concretely, historically engaged but that continues to reverberate over the '*long duree*' of modern racism. Implicitly referencing Thomas Jefferson as a founding father of a 'multiracial nation' that we ought to admit and celebrate, Sundstrom uses 'multiracial' as a qualifier for family in ways that reassert the matrix of heterosexual breeding as well as a disavowal of the violence of this sexual encounter through the celebratory turn to 'family.' If we accept Sundstrom's claims then

³³⁴ Sundstrom (2008), 7-8.

we accept on some level the idea that we should admit and celebrate the violent exploitation of heterosexual biological reproductive capacities (in this case through Jefferson's rape of slaves).³³⁵ It isn't clear how we can or should call this a 'family' unless we rely solely on biology. In which case, we ought to be highly suspicious of any celebratory stance.

Sundstrom's use of 'multiracial' and 'interracial' assumes that the unacknowledged 'facts' of historical 'mixing' (understood implicitly as sexual breeding practices), and of 'interracial intimacies' that built a 'multiracial nation,' was a matter of a cognitive mistake rather than evidence of a practice of naming that was and is invested in the continuation of violences of literal and symbolic capture/captivity. It's not quite clear that a mixed-blood nation would be Jefferson's worst nightmare, for example. His concern was not the literal existence of people who could or would challenge a 'rigid' color line with 'multiraciality' or cause confusion for a biracial (black-white) system. For he practiced a type of varied, fluid racial naming practice himself with his understanding that whiteness could be gained upon receiving one's 'freedom' and having less than a quarter of 'black blood.'³³⁶ His goals were in maintaining a system of racial slavery and racial domination, which did and does persist *with* recognition of terms of mixed race.

We must remember the past and especially our 'forefathers' but we must do so in the context of understanding slavery as violent conquest and exploitation rather than the unfortunate

³³⁵ How is it possible for one to "celebrate" the "multiracial...origins of the state" as part of the project of liberal progressivism when violences—rape, sexual exploitation, reproductive injustices, patriarchy, imperialism, settler coloniality, and more—labored to structure 'race' as we know it—as a repeated practice of classification, of naming according to categorical divisions working to uphold the naturalization of race as something one 'is' or 'has'? My claim is not that 'multiracial' or other terms concerning 'race mixture' are fully determined, solely representing the functioning of oppression, but that *how* we use these terms is susceptible to furthering the racist logic through which and in which it continues to be birthed. We cannot hang a celebratory cloak on multiraciality, simply on account of its 'existence' given that this mode for understanding multiraciality continues to emerge and be informed by a milieu of oppression(s).

³³⁶ Ariela Gross. (2008). *What Blood Won't Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, MA.

ground through which a multiracial nation could be birthed. Indeed we have an obligation to memory, but not one that implicitly is grounded in and promotes logics we are trying to contest, for, as Sharon P. Holland argues, “We are not done with slavery because we have not yet to thoroughly investigate its psychic life.”³³⁷ This is an obligation to think the present as an allegory of the past, as Saidiya Hartman suggests. As Holland puts it “To rethink slavery among us is to take seriously the ways in which its logic of property, belonging, and family reshaped each and every one of those concepts *irrevocably*, as well as the lives of the subjects—black, white, native, Hispanic—who lived within this discursive logic.”³³⁸

(Re)claiming the history of the U.S. as a history of a multiracial nation with ‘multiracial families’ in the present does not challenge the historical order that forcibly and repeatedly names and classifies in the first place. Both denying the term ‘multiracial’ in the past and ‘reclaiming’ it as a descriptor today are two sides of the same coin. ‘Re-capturing’ the terms ‘interracial’ or ‘multiracial’ in a neutral or unreflective celebratory manner does little to contest the sociosymbolic and material dynamics of the state as it mandates terminology creating racial distinctions in order to maintain its capacity to reproduce its terms of inclusion and exclusion. As Minelle Mahtani reminds us,

It cannot be forgotten, as so commonly seems to happen now, that the history of multiraciality is a history of the racism that emerged directly out of transnational slavery. This history has implications not only for those who are part black but also for those who are of other racialized mixes. These myths clearly dictate how material representations and their subsequent powerful ideologies naturalize inequalities (see Saldanha 20006) and mask the relationship between the powerful and the powerless, creating geographies of exclusion.³³⁹

³³⁷ Sharon P. Holland. (2012) *The Erotic Life of Racism*. Duke University Press: Durham, NC, 31.

³³⁸ *Ibid*, 31.

³³⁹ Minele Mahtani. (2014). *Mixed Race Amnesia: Resisting the Romanticization of Multiraciality*. UBC Press: Vancouver, BC, 36.

In utilizing the insights of history for understanding our present, as one should and as one must, we ought to attend to the depths to which a dominant, historical mode of sense-making inculcates us. Having an experience with history, as Walter Benjamin implores us to, requires an understanding of the limits of accepting certain phenomena and concepts straightforwardly as given, potentially removed or removable from the sociopolitical order in which they are birthed.

This is why, as I wish to suggest, we cannot offer ‘repair’ and the obligation to memory as a responsible multiracial politics. If conceiving of ‘what’ we are remembering is informed by modes of racial domination, then we are neglecting to challenge racism in the fullest sense. Sundstrom makes of racism an ‘error’ that produced ruptures that in turn foreground the need to repair these ‘errors’ by way of responding ‘responsibly’ and ‘ethically’ to these ruptures. This comes in the form of an obligation to ‘remember one’s mother’ according to Sundstrom. In so doing, presumably, we are able to correct the historical veiling that allows for racism to persist in the form of the drive toward monoraciality and segregation practices. But this is not a robust enough understanding of racism and what it takes to challenge it. Challenging racism requires a *refusal* of logics that position ‘multiracial families’ and a ‘multiracial nation’ straightforwardly as that which ought to be named as such and celebrated.

c. The Challenge to Sundstrom’s Implicit Challenge to Racism

In general, interracial relationships and marriage has been envisioned as a direct challenge to the racism of the past as it concerned segregation practices. Sundstrom expresses this position in his claim that “interracial intimate relationships—from casual romances to adoption—are done

in the face of racisms at all levels and go against the grain of racist social mores to limit such liberty.”³⁴⁰ ‘Interracial’ as a modifier of ‘relationships’ today seems to signal free movement across ‘the color line’ and free association with people of ‘different’ races and so interracial relationships are represented as a *response* to racism. But this assumes racism to be primarily a practice (and result) of ‘races’ remaining apart. My claim is that this is a flattened and incomplete assessment of the institutional and conceptual investments of racial domination and state power in *managing* patterns of relations such that forms of interracial relations were not solely prohibited, but also either tolerated, ignored, encouraged, denigrated, or other. An understanding of racism as primarily prohibitive is incomplete and neutralizes the violences of historical forms of multiracial expressions. ‘Interracial’ and ‘mixed race,’ I argue, are not facts of our social world, but rather, are part of a historical-social milieu of racialization that operated (and continues to operate) on a host of registers—social, political, libidinal, psychic, etc.

Sundstrom’s approach to understanding interracial intimacy and racism neglects attention to the complexities of *how* relations were managed by the state. We tend to focus on the ‘fact’ that races were kept *separated*. That is, U.S. racial history is primarily understood to be one of antiscegenist sentiment, interracial pathology, and laws against interracial interactions. But we ought to complicate this notion. For, the ways in which antiscegenation policy was advanced showcases state interests that exceeded simply the restriction of interracial exchanges, but actively partook in *outlining* and thus producing, either through legal disinterest or codification, what forms of ‘miscegenation’ would be tolerated, encouraged, ignored, denigrated, or prohibited. For example, while laws creating punitive measures for consensual interracial sex emerged as early as 1662 in Virginia, Randall Kennedy notes how, as cited by Siobhan Somerville, “the same officials

³⁴⁰ Sundstrom (2008), 103.

who insisted that interracial marriage pose a dire threat to white civilization resisted attempts to prevent sexual relations across the race line, especially when trespassing involved white men.”³⁴¹ This was a matter of privilege and the fact that, as Renee C. Romano describes, as cited by Somerville, “most interracial sexual relationships involved white men and black women” which was “often a manifestation of white male privilege” wherein these relationships could produce children but “these children would not be considered the legitimate heir of their white kin.”³⁴² We need to not only consider the historical existence of interracial relationships and ‘multiracial families,’ but we need to understand the state’s investment in controlling *which* ‘interracial relationships’ became important to manage and *how* and *why*. Legislating marriage became particularly important because it was one arena in which the racial status quo could be challenged.³⁴³ Unlike ‘interracial’ sex (e.g. rape in this period), which had been occurring throughout and since the transatlantic slave trade and colonial inquisition, state sanctioned *marriage*, especially after emancipation, posed a threat to the specific white patrilineal historical order.³⁴⁴ This is why, as Romano writes as cited by Somerville, “States accordingly expended much more effort to prevent interracial marriage than interracial sex per se. In 1940 thirty-one states had laws prohibiting interracial marriage, yet only six states barred interracial fornication.”³⁴⁵

An understanding of racism in the U.S. must center on its roots in white supremacy and antiblackness given the persistence of this political ontology in the present. ‘Centering’ here ought not be read as ‘prioritizing’ attention to the relations between blacks and whites as generating one’s

³⁴¹ Sioban B. Somerville. (2005). “Queer Loving.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. 11.5, 338.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Hortense J. Spillers. (1987). “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book.” *Diacritics*. 17.2.

³⁴⁵ Somerville (2005), 338.

frame of analysis. Rather, my claim is that it is only through attention to the intricacies and continuities of a historical-social epoch structured by relations of force manifesting the ‘human’ in terms of one’s proximity to a system that at one end made humans into property and at the other into gods,³⁴⁶ can we respond more fully to the historical task at hand, which is a radical destruction of (and in the process, creation of new) material and symbolic schemas.

III. Concluding Remarks

Race as somehow given, somehow divorced from the material and symbolic political systems in which and *through* which they were (and are) birthed is a story we’ve told ourselves for so long, so sincerely, so deeply, that we understand phenomena such as colonial histories, transatlantic slavery, and migration to be matters in which ‘races’ encountered one another and thereby ‘mixed.’ But racialization is not a practice of manipulation of features that would otherwise be a matter of neutral observation. We cannot ‘rescue’ an underlying multiraciality as a ‘fact’ or a given that we can thereby use to articulate the myth of monoraciality. If we do this, we partake in the underlying acceptance of purity or impurity as actually something that can be manifest or warded against.

Naming interraciality and multiraciality in the way Sundstrom does, as the ground of reference for both recapturing a form of ‘actual’ historical multiraciality and projecting a future multiraciality in the form of further ‘inevitable’ amalgamation is problematic to the extent that it appeals to history in an ahistorical way, leaving claims about challenging racism *through* these terms ineffectual at best and harmful at worst. Multiraciality is positioned by Sundstrom as the

³⁴⁶ Lewis Gordon. (1995). “Critical ‘Mixed Race?’” *Social Identities*. 1.2.

corrective to a persistent monoraciality, which implicitly locates the problem of racism in practices of segregation, separation, and restriction or prohibition. This neglects attention to the variety of forms racism takes and has taken, particularly in ways that exceed or operate beyond solely prohibitive mechanisms. Instead, historically and presently, institutional attention to ‘interracial intimacies’ *produced* and *produces* dominant meaning(s) of ‘interracial’ through the many attempts to recognize, name, and/or legislate it, whether for the professed reasons of restriction or valorization. Juridical, legislative, or formal policy-based attention to ‘interraciality’ simultaneously has produced an outside—what *does not* get legislated (for example, ‘interracial sex’ between white men and black women) or what falls out of the purview of the signifier ‘multiracial’ or ‘interracial’ as the concept becomes solidified according to dominant logics. The space for liberatory thought and action arises in attention to these processes as a lens for understanding interraciality and racial domination.

One arena today in which the state’s interest in controlling modes of racialization and ways in which familial belonging is made manifest is in politics concerning immigration and citizenship practices, which I explore in the next chapter. Because ‘citizen’ is so often approached as a straightforward juridical category, we do not attend to the ways that it, like race, is *produced* as an *a priori* given, as a matter simply existent in our social world, rather than continually forged through political logics of racial-national belonging. The borders of citizenship produce borders between kin. With the example of citizenship, it is easier to see how these borders are explicitly *instituted* through law, policy, exploitation, and oftentimes, violent struggle. But this is the case for the history of patterns of racial domination, as well. ‘Races’ were not simply ‘found’ categories of neutral belonging, which were then acted upon and manipulated into a socio-symbolic and material racial hierarchy. Rather, they were instituted, alongside and through the institution of

terms of mixed-, multi-, and inter- raciality. This is why we cannot and ought not attempt to recoup, restore, or repair the ‘ruptures’ generated by mixed race; for the ruptures of race, more properly understood, do not signify the errors or occlusions of a system of racial domination that demand fixing, but the persistent faulty conceptualizations of the *functioning of the system* that demand attention.

Sundstrom argues that if we take the principles of liberal democracies seriously, the state has a vested interest in “tearing down the veil of lies and illusions that has propagated the myth and demands for a monoracial state and family.”³⁴⁷ But what if the state’s ‘vested interested’ in doing so comes at the expense of further oppressions, or *by way* of further oppressions, particularly those levied through patterns of state control over determining terms of racial-national belonging through the mechanism of citizenship practices? I turn next to an analysis of the functioning of race and national citizenship to explore possible conceptual links between ‘mixed race’ and an analytic category that has gained increasing attention in immigration discourses today—‘mixed citizenship status’—in order to show how a politics of mixed race more attendant to the political ontology of race could be forged.

³⁴⁷ Sundstrom (2008), 105.

Chapter 5

Race, Citizenship, and the State: Understanding 'Mixed Race' alongside 'Mixed Status'

Discourses on multiraciality in the U.S. have tended to operate within a national frame. When connections *are* made to other nations' constructions of race and mixed race, it is often done superficially. For instance, in an editorial piece embracing actor Taye Diggs' claim that when we call biracial kids 'black' we disrespect their 'white side,' the author approvingly appeals to South Africa and Latin America and writes, "It's time that we Americans consider changing our attitude toward [race] and look at the way other countries have gotten with the times and describe different kinds of mixed-race people."³⁴⁸ This naïve appeal disregards geopolitical histories in these regions and lacks historicization of the terms of mixedness she embraces in the hopes of encouraging their use in the U.S. context. I suspect, for instance, that the author does not want to embrace the violent bureaucratic system of Apartheid racial classifications nor do I think she wishes to accept the effects of colorism evident in many nations that maintain 'racial democracies.' Naomi Zack, similarly appeals to other racializing systems, such as those of Brazil's, in comparison to the U.S. As she writes,

Where there is some recognition that mixed-race people exist, as there was in the old lower South and still in Brazil, the metaphors 'black' and 'white' are abandoned in favor of color words which come closer to describing what it is that people see when they look at skin colors... It is almost if, in the presence of those individuals who are perceived to be mixed black and white race, the reality of human perception reasserts itself, and an attempt is made to speak the truth about visual experience.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁸ Diana Ozemebhoya Eromosele. (2015). "Why I Agree with Taye Diggs: When We Call Biracial Kids 'Black,' We Disrespect Their White Side." *The Root*. From <https://thegrapevine.theroot.com/why-i-agree-with-taye-diggs-when-we-call-biracial-kids-1790887394>

³⁴⁹ Naomi Zack. (2004). "Black, White, and Gray: Words, Words, Words" In *'Mixed Race' Studies: A Reader*. Edited by Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe. Routledge: New York, NY, 156.

Though she does admit that these “mixed race color words” may be offensive “against the backdrop of a biracial system” in the U.S., she nevertheless asserts their having “more human reality than those color words ‘black’ and ‘white’”³⁵⁰ and so would seem to approve of this over the current U.S. biracial system.

A comparative appeal to race and mixed race transnationally ought not come in the form of mere comparison or analogy of the existence of terms of mixed race. If we are going to appeal to other nations and transnational flows of knowledge production concerning race, we need to more deeply contextualize and historicize that appeal. Much good work has been done in this regard. For example, scholars have explored different formations of conceptions of race and racism in order to break out of the hegemony and normativity of the U.S. framework. In this way, one is able to see U.S. conceptions of race and racism as but one form race/racism can take, thus providing a fuller understanding of the nature and plurality of race and racisms.³⁵¹ Additionally, scholars have worked to understand the *transmission* of conceptions of race when borders are crossed and the effects this has on conceptions of race and racism wholesale.³⁵²

In this chapter, however, my goals are small and rather exploratory. I want to broaden the frame of mixed race discourse in the U.S. to an analysis of how trans migratory flows of individuals, specifically from Mexico, and the fraught legal, political, and social histories between the U.S. and Mexico that condition this movement, urges us to build connections between ‘mixed race’ and the subject of ‘mixed citizenship status’ relations evident in contemporary U.S.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ See Lisa Lowe. (2015). *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Duke University Press: Durham, NC; Juliet Hooker. (2017). *Theorizing Race in the Americas: Douglass, Sarmiento, Du Bois, and Vasconcelos*. Oxford University Press: New York, NY; Patrick Wolfe. (2016). *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race*. Verso: London, UK; David Theo Goldberg (2009). Blackwell Publishing: Malden, MA.

³⁵² See Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books: San Francisco, CA; Cristina Beltrán. (2010). *The Trouble With Unity*. Oxford University Press: New York, NY; Zimitri Erasmus. (2018). *Race Otherwise: Forging a New Humanism for South Africa*. Wits University Press: Johannesburg, South Africa.

immigration discourses. I will not claim that my analysis is in any way ‘transnational’ or breaks significantly from a centering on the U.S., but I will speak from the position of the U.S. context in order to think beyond the frame of the nation for U.S. mixed race politics. I will consider how the history of the U.S.’s racialized citizenship helps us think about a current situation wherein individuals continue to be racialized in a *de facto* sense via their relation to citizenship. This is evident in the category of ‘mixed status’ that describes individuals or families who are in relationships or familial arrangements wherein individuals have different citizenship statuses. In this chapter, then, most broadly, I discuss practices of racialization via practices of citizenship in relation to national and political agendas. I focus on the migratory flows across the U.S./Mexico border because of the current climate of heightened political attention paid to this geopolitical space. My analysis here could perhaps be extended to the transmission between the U.S. and other national and geographical borders such as the Middle East and Asia, but given the literature of ‘mixed status’ relations specifically in relation to Mexican immigration, I will focus my attention here for now.

The U.S. likes to think of itself as a land of immigrants that is exceptional in its welcoming sensibility. Think here of the narrative of an America that welcomes the “tired...poor...huddled masses” with open arms. This is of course ultimately a myth and we must continually remind ourselves that citizen-belonging in this country has always been one that is particularized based on race, gender, class, marriage status, and more. Increasingly, we have witnessed the effects of nativism that have generated a type of implicit racialized citizenship rejecting those from Mexico and Latin America more generally with the taunt of illegality applied to human beings. This is generated by and generates an increasingly criminalizing approach to ‘the border’—both literal and figurative—of national belonging. Modes of policing and difficult paths toward citizenship

have manifested in the tearing apart of families and the building of tenuous relationships and modes of living for those in what is now referred to as ‘mixed citizenship status’ relationships and families. Many U.S. citizens and non-citizens live in/as ‘mixed status families.’ I tentatively wish to suggest that this experience and discursive formation might be understood productively through the frame of ‘mixed race’ and a history of ‘mixed racialization’ concerning racial-national belonging. Doing so, I think, would help develop a discourse on mixed race that makes clear the political relations and political effects manifest in state control over the rules of cultural intelligibility, legibility, and integrity for determining one’s status in a given historical racial order.

As Joanna Dreby states, “When the immigration system emphasizes enforcement over legalization, legal status becomes the basis for social distinction in ways much like the effects of race, class, gender, and generation on the lives of children and families.”³⁵³ These political processes institute certain acceptable interpersonal arrangements and sociopolitical relations. While processes of race and gender have become more ‘naturalized’ in the sense that they appear as given features of our biological and/or social world, processes related to citizenship is a matter that is perhaps more transparently political. What I mean by this is that citizenship is a category in today’s geopolitical arena that is more explicitly connected with conferral by state mechanisms operating through patterns of political recognition, negotiation, and contestation of national territories and the sociosymbolic belonging of people (or, ‘a people’). In centering on the historical and political connections *between* as well as the co-constitution *of* ‘race’ and ‘nation,’ my hope is that we may use this to develop a different sensibility and lexicon in regards to mixed race politics in the U.S. today.

³⁵³ Joanna Dreby. (2005). *Everyday Illegal: When Policies Undermine Immigrant Families*. University of California Press. Oakland, CA, 16.

In this dissertation, I have been critiquing modes of understanding ‘mixed race’ in the U.S. that are divorced from an understanding of the political ontology of race, those that accept *as actual* and self-evident the existence of ‘mixed race’ and the presence of mixed race people. My hope in exploring the conjunction of race and nation at the site of mixed race/mixed status is that we can develop political uses for a language of mixed race-radically reconceived. That is, we can develop a mode of sense for understanding mixed race that makes apparent and centers the ways in which our historical political order generates ‘mixedness’ as political relations that survive by way of “relations of force” and are “elaborated or *institutionalized* within relations of power.”³⁵⁴ ‘Mixed status’ is generated through such relations of force and power in regards to the state and systems of white supremacy. Inviting ‘mixed status’ into discourses of ‘mixed race’ could trouble the various taken-for-granted logics of what constitutes mixed race in the U.S. For example, in recognizing the conjunction of practices of race and national belonging, we might understand how, as April Schueths describes, “anti-miscegenation laws have simply manifested themselves in a new way,” since “under federal immigration law Congress is permitted to discriminate against certain marriages between a U.S. citizen and an immigrant spouse, all in the name of protecting our nation from foreign powers.”³⁵⁵

The nation-state is maintained through its ability to both formally, and in more *de facto* ways, culturally legitimize who is and is not desired to represent the nation. As a nation with a strong history and present-day situation of white supremacy, the U.S. has maintained its investment in whiteness through attempts to manage interpersonal relations, familial

³⁵⁴ Jared Sexton. (2008). *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN, 9.

³⁵⁵ April Schueths. (2015). “Barriers to Interracial Marriage? Examining Policy Issues Concerning U.S. Citizens Married to Undocumented Latino/a Immigrants.” *Journal of Social Issues*. 71.4, 812.

arrangements, and other patterns of belonging through policy and material distribution and cultural valuation that privileges ‘whiteness’ and devalues racialized subjectivity.

My aim in this chapter is to show how processes of citizenship in the U.S. are always already racializing. As I wish to argue, this makes the ‘non-citizen’ or assumed-to-be foreigner, via its cultural resonance within the U.S., differently raced than those assumed-to-be-citizens. If this is the case, the ‘mixed status’ of individuals and families in the U.S. provides the opportunity to think about instances wherein we might conceive of ‘mixed race’ in ways more attendant to patterns of political relationality and outside reinscriptions of the biologization of race or the heteronormativity of ‘mixed’ race. In making the connection between ‘mixed race’ and ‘mixed status,’ the hope is to provide the impetus for productively expanding (and perhaps, exploding) the meaning of mixed race in standard discourses in the U.S. today, challenging putative logics that, as I have shown in previous chapters, reproduce oppressions via consolidations of normative models of mixed race typically advanced through a descriptive register.

I. Comparative Analysis of Mixture in U.S. and Mexico

In order to distinguish my plan in this chapter from other comparisons of ‘mixture’ in the U.S. and Mexico, I will take a brief detour through the work of Suzanne Bost. Bost comparatively studies the U.S. and Mexico at the site of how each context has dealt with and deals with racial mixture. This scholarship is worth briefly overviewing here, in order to both build a geopolitical architecture surrounding approaches to ‘mixedness’ comparatively in these contexts, but also to distinguish how I wish to explore the potentials for building contemporary theoretical links between the politics of mixed race in the U.S. today and conversations on ‘mixed status.’ Instead

of looking at the social and political fields of enunciation and the conceptual structures of representations of mixedness therein in each context like Bost does, I want to frustrate standard modes of sense in the U.S. that disarticulate race from citizenship and thus ‘mixed race’ from ‘mixed status.’

In *Mulattas and Mestizas*, Bost explores the forms of ‘mixed race’ representations that have emerged in the contexts of Mexico and the U.S., specifically focusing on the last half of the 19th century and the 20th century. Mixture was central to the development of racial systems in both contexts, though each developed very different systems. As Bost writes, “Although the two regions’ [Mexico’s and the U.S.’s] dominant racial paradigms differed dramatically, both were founded on a reaction to interracial mixture and a preoccupation with fluidity.”³⁵⁶ Speaking in broad strokes, racial mixture in Mexico became the pinnacle of national identity, creating what Jose Vasconcelos described as *La Raza Cosmica*, or the Cosmic Race.³⁵⁷ This was an approach to national unity that centered everyone’s shared history of ‘mixture’—primarily indigenous and white European roots. Curiously (or perhaps not so curiously), the nation’s African roots often went unrecognized in this marshaling of national belonging based in shared ‘mixed’-racial belonging. In the U.S., racial mixture was recognized to the extent that it was the marker of a violation of a biracial (black and white) racial schema, as Bost describes. The figure of the ‘tragic mulatto’ is exemplary in this regard. While racial mixture was, on the surface, embraced in Mexico, it was, on the surface, disavowed in the U.S. But both of these histories can be more nuanced since, as Bost describes, “Racial rhetoric that appeared tolerant on the surface was often based on racism” and colorism existed in many ways due to a specific history wherein “Spanish

³⁵⁶ Suzanne Bost. (2005). *Mulattas and Mestizas: Representing Mixed Identities in the Americas, 1850-2000*. The University of Georgia Press: Athens, GA, 15.

³⁵⁷ José Vasconcelos. (1925). *La Raza Cós mica*. Trans. By Didier T. Jaén (1979). Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, MA.

officials initially endorsed mixture with the darker-skinned native peoples only to achieve Spanish imperialist goals. In this way, racial hierarchies existed in tension with racial fluidity.”³⁵⁸ Additionally, though a biracial schema is the dominant historical approach for understanding race in the U.S., as I discussed in chapter one, race should perhaps be more fluidly understood given the transparency of difficulties in actually attaining a strict biracial system. What resulted from these difficulties was understandings of race that appeared to actually admit of ‘mixedness’ within categories (whiteness that admitted of ‘native Indian blood’) and/or a fluidity of race (recall Thomas Jefferson’s sons with Sally Hemmings as having different race categorizations on the census upon his death).³⁵⁹ As Bost summarizes,

Racial identities develop in relation to national and political agendas, as *mestizaje* was historically idealized as a harmonious blending to facilitate Mexican nation-building, whereas mulatto mixtures were conceived as a violation of an essential black-white binary to solidify the racial hierarchy as the foundation of U.S. slavery and Jim Crow.³⁶⁰

In her study, Bost goes on to describe the role racial mixedness played in each of these contexts in order to temper the quick valorization of mixedness as new in the U.S. and as a potential savior motif since the example of Mexico shows otherwise. Additionally, she historicizes mixture across the history of the U.S. in order to show how it is not ‘new’ in the sense in which many multiracial advocates in the late 20th century wanted to claim in the U.S. Indeed, if mixture “has been central to the definition of race for all of America’s history,”³⁶¹ we therefore need to proceed with caution and guard against uncritical and ahistorical valorizations of mixed race.

³⁵⁸ Bost (2005), 22.

³⁵⁹ As Bost concurs, “I would argue that the attempt to segregate black and white in the United States rests on a fluidity comparable to *mestizaje* in the Southwest and Mexico, but this fluidity is obscured by historically different racial definition, legal segregation, and historians’ insistence on viewing U.S. race relations through binary division. As Victor Valle and Rodolfo Torres claim, the majority of Americans are mestizos ‘under the skin,’ but *mestizaje* occurs in the interstices of mainstream U.S. culture, outside the illusory boundaries that the dominant center attempts to draw around American identity (148, 152). Indeed, perhaps mixture is the defining racial characteristic in the United States” (44-45).

³⁶⁰ Ibid, 10.

³⁶¹ Ibid, 5.

Discussions of racial mixture in the contexts of the U.S. and Mexico have tended to come through comparison of the *terms* of racial mixture that emanate out of each context: *mulatta* and *mestiza*, as Bost's title suggests. In this chapter, however, I want to look at the current context of the U.S. and its relation to Mexican immigration to suggest another entrance into a discussion of 'mixture'—one that does not center on analysis of terms of representation, but processes of racialization that manifest 'mixedness'—for example, contemporary 'mixed status' relationships and families. This is not a 'mixedness' in standard racial terms, of course, but, as I will argue, perhaps we can think of this mixedness by way of 'citizenship' as importantly 'racial,' given the tight connection between processes of racial and national belonging.

In what follows, I will first discuss more generally the tight historical and conceptual relation between race and citizenship status in the U.S. I then address the specific case of Mexican and U.S. interactions today concerning race, migratory flows, enactments of state power, and the result of 'mixed status' individuals and families. I conclude by gesturing towards a revised mixed race politics that, in including discourses of mixed-status individuals and families in its purview, troubles standard notions of 'mixed race' as a distinct racial subject and instead positions it as a locus of political relations upheld by patterns of white supremacy that must be transformed.

II. Histories of Race and Citizenship as Intermeshed Processes of Racial-National Belonging

We often think of citizenship as a positive good, a status conferred that recognizes and allows for rights and participation in civic society. It is also, however, in this process of granting inclusion in a polity, a matter of the simultaneous exclusion of others. It is recognized as a term that grounds political claims, but as Uma Narayan remarks, appealing to citizenship in this way

“might at times be problematic in a world where many nations increasingly contain large numbers of people who participate in national life, but who are non-citizens.”³⁶² We might even go further to say that citizenship, rather than being primarily a positive *good* is a practice of negative movement away from communities of oppressed foreigners and so is problematic as an ideal.³⁶³

In assuming citizenship as a positive *good*, we also typically conceive of it as something one has or doesn't have. One *is* or *is not* a citizen. But ‘citizenship,’ in an oppressive social schema, is a status undivorced from other social phenomena conferring belonging via forms of identity, social status, and material distribution. As scholars have noted, for example, while the *Loving v. Virginia* decision did expand rights to those of different races to marry, “it also effectively consolidated heterosexuality as a privileged prerequisite for recognition by the state as a national subject and citizen.”³⁶⁴ Specifically, as Siobhan Somerville points out, this came at a time when “the nation was defensively constituted as heterosexual, incapable of incorporating the sexually suspect body” given that the “Supreme Court had reaffirmed the exclusion of homosexuals from citizenship only three weeks earlier [than the *Loving* decision].”³⁶⁵ It is important to consider *how* legal, social, political ‘achievements’ are made. What is the context surrounding and thus conditioning various forms of belonging, ways of knowing, and ways of relating? Centering renewed attention to the processes and institutional investments of the state surrounding social positions that are assumed to be ‘natural,’ or a given of sorts allows us to tell different stories and build opportunities for connection, against the grain of naturalizing discourses.

³⁶² Uma Narayan. (1995). “Toward a Feminist Vision of Citizenship.” *Reconstructing Political Theory*. Ed. by Mary Lyndon Shanley and Uma Narayan. The Pennsylvania State University Press. University Park, PA, 64.

³⁶³ Kunal M. Parker. (2015). *Making Foreigners: Immigration and Citizenship Law in America, 1600-2000*. Cambridge University Press. New York, NY.

³⁶⁴ Siobhan B. Somerville. (2005). “Queer Loving.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. 11.3, 357. See also Somerville (2000); Pascoe (2009); Ibrahim (2012).

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Scholars have been keen to identify ways in which citizenship practices have intersected with racializing practices in order to create a politics of national belonging. Prior to the 14th Amendment passed in 1868, which granted citizenship to anyone who was born in the U.S. (what we commonly call ‘birthright citizenship’), citizenship was allocated for ‘white persons.’ The 14th amendment granted citizenship to African American former slaves, allowing at this point whites and blacks to be eligible for citizenship. Ian Haney López articulates two main periods of racial prerequisites for citizenship—1790-1870 wherein naturalization was restricted to ‘white person’—and 1870-1952 wherein whites and blacks were eligible for citizenship, leaving those who did not appear self-evidently white or black (particularly those from Asia) in a precarious position.³⁶⁶ Given the restriction of the second period of racial prerequisites for citizenship in the U.S. and the rising number of Asian and Middle Eastern immigrants at that time, the question was often whether or not these individuals were ‘white’ so that they may (or may not) be permitted to naturalize. As Natalia Molina writes, “According to the Naturalization Act of 1790 and its revision in 1870, only those who were deemed white or black could become citizens, so there was much at stake in how one answered ‘Who is a white man?’”³⁶⁷ Of course one could petition to become a citizen by way of claiming blackness, but given the racialization of blackness as a second class, devalued or ‘alien’ citizenship status, all but one of the 52 racial prerequisite cases in the late 19th and early 20th century sought to establish a person’s whiteness, rather than blackness, so as to establish their eligibility for citizenship.³⁶⁸ These moments within history show that, as

Bill Ong Hing writes, ‘The discussion of who is and who is not American, who can and cannot become American, goes beyond the technicalities of citizenship and residency

³⁶⁶ Ian Haney López. (2006). *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race*. New York University Press. New York, NY.

³⁶⁷ Natalia Molina. (2014). *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*. University of California Press: Berkeley, CA, 43.

³⁶⁸ Haney López (2006), 30-31. We can assume that this was because while blacks were eligible for citizenship formally, they were granted a second-class citizenship in practice.

requirements; it strikes at the very heart of our nation's long and troubled legacy of race relations.' As this troubled legacy reveals, the triumph over racial discrimination in the laws of citizenship and alienage come slowly and only recently. In the campaign for the 'control of our borders,' we are once again debating the citizenship of the native-born and the merits of *Dred Scott*.³⁶⁹

With this in mind, it is therefore not surprising that the 14th Amendment remains an ambivalent and contentious feature of American life. Contemporarily, the 14th amendment has come under fire specifically by way of nativist and anti-Latinx sentiment. "Since the mid-1980s," as Annie Menzel describes, "it has been under sustained attack, with at least one proposal to end birthright citizenship in one or both houses of Congress each session since 1987 (Lee 2005; U.S. House 2007a,b; U.S. Senate 2008) and numerous proposed state initiatives (Ho 2008)" (30). Much of this has been in response to undocumented Mexican immigration.³⁷⁰

Given the history of racialized citizenship in the U.S. and proposals in the present for ending birthright citizenship, we ought to understand the 14th amendment as never securely won in terms of granting symbolic integrity to a 'liberated subject position' of newly freed black women and men. Rather, its abstract juridical granting of birthright citizenship paves the way for an effective stripping-of-status *as well as* of a language to contest this theft. Blacks were 'welcomed' into formal citizenship, allowing racial domination to persist in forms other than chattel slavery, such as the prison system. The continuity of racial oppression thus became and becomes difficult to trace, as blacks were formally emancipated but susceptible to being charged with criminality, which provided a legal route to imprisonment (as enslavement). In thinking about concomitant histories of racial domination suffered by black and brown folk, it is interesting to note here, as Molina describes, that the first racialized group (other than white) to be granted citizenship was Mexicans with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. This, as she writes, "laid the groundwork

³⁶⁹ Ibid, 30.

³⁷⁰ Annie Menzel. (2013). "Birthright Citizenship and the Racial Contract." *Du Bois Review*. 10.1, 30.

for citizenship in name only” since Mexicans were “stripped of their land and the economic and political wherewithal that accompanies land ownership...effectively [denying them] equitable access to resources.”³⁷¹ Citizenship for those racialized as nonwhite (and really, for those in any non-normative standing) is an effect of conferring a ‘name’—‘citizen’—that lacks what we might call cultural integrity. It is what can be usurped, manipulated, or challenged at any time.

As López alludes to, today citizenship continues to be a tenuous venture. ‘Triumphs’ are by no means given or unchanging. Particularly, discourses on the ‘alien citizen’ make clear the ways in which citizenship is never simply something one has or doesn’t have (that is, one has or doesn’t have certain freedoms of mobility, status, and belonging). As Mae M. Ngai describes, “the alien citizen is an American citizen by virtue of her birth in the United States but whose citizenship is suspect, if not denied, on account of the racialized identity of her immigrant ancestry.”³⁷² As Ngai continues, this “foreignness” is “deemed unalterable” and thus makes “nationality a kind of racial trait” that can be “passed from generation to generation.” This ‘alien citizenship’ is not simply a matter of *de facto* differential treatment, but can become instances of “official alien citizenship.”³⁷³ Take for example the “repatriation (territorial removal) of 400,000 ethnic Mexicans during the Great Depression, half of them U.S. citizens” as well as “the internment of 120,000 people of Japanese descent during World War II, two-thirds of them U.S. citizens.”³⁷⁴ Additionally, we can think of the numerous white women whose citizenship was revoked because of their marriage to non-citizens at the turn of the 20th century due to the Expatriation Act of 1907. This included non-citizens of any nationality. It wasn’t until the Cable Act of 1922 that allowed women to retain their citizenship upon marrying a non-citizen, but only if their married partner

³⁷¹ Molina (2014), 27-28

³⁷² Mae M. Ngai. (2007). “Birthright Citizenship and the Alien Citizen.” *Fordham Law Review*. 75, 2521.

³⁷³ *Ibid*, 2522.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid*.

could become a citizen. This still maintained the loss of citizenship for U.S. American women who married individuals who did not meet racial eligibility for citizenship at the time.³⁷⁵

As Ngai concludes, “alien citizenship is a defining *legal* characteristic of the racial formation of Asian and Latino ethnic groups.”³⁷⁶ This is true of most if not all ‘nonwhite’ or what we might call ‘tenuously white’ groups in the U.S. As such, we ought to understand that “access to citizenship, including birthright citizenship in the United States, is not fixed, but politically contingent.”³⁷⁷ In the past four decades, four countries have restricted or done away with birthright citizenship, including Great Britain in 1981, Australia in 1986, Ireland in 2004, and New Zealand in 2006.³⁷⁸ Overall, citizenship should thus be more readily understood as a tenuous racializing practice given these historical markers and codifications within law.

I note this history and present day situation in order to situate a discussion on the political nature of citizenship within the frame of a political ontology of race, one in which the historical order of white supremacy reigns. Citizenship cannot be understood outside of the mechanisms of producing a racial-national politics of belonging. “The racial composition of the U.S. citizenry”—and I would add, of U.S. *alien* citizenship—“...reflects the conscious design of U.S. immigration and naturalization laws.”³⁷⁹ Citizenship is thus not so straightforward as simply having or not having citizenship and countless historical examples showcase this contingency, especially in regards to the racialization of citizenship. Therefore, we ought to think of citizenship as practices of controlling national borders by way of producing a ‘legitimate’ population. The institution of borders requires forms of identifying who will be part of the national body and who will not. And

³⁷⁵ Tanya Ballard Brown. (2017). “That Time American Women Lost Their Citizenship Because They Married Foreigners.” *NPR*. From <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/03/17/520517665/that-time-american-women-lost-their-citizenship-because-they-married-foreigners>

³⁷⁶ Ngai (2007), 2523.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 2525.

³⁷⁸ Menzel (2013), 30.

³⁷⁹ Haney López (2006), 27.

it is about the constant reproduction of 1) a particular type of subject the state deems worthy as well as 2) institutions that have the ability to decide which type of subject will be reproduced and what status they will have within a signifying system of white supremacy. We have witnessed this most recently with the ‘travel bans’ attempted in 2017 and continuing to today by the 45th presidency of the U.S., which initially sought to restrict travel for individuals of seven ‘Muslim-majority’ (and typically considered ‘non-white’) countries including Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, North Korea, Chad, and Yemen.

Instead of assuming the story of a ‘multiracial nation’ as a history that needs to be recuperated á la Sundstrom as we saw in the previous chapter, we ought to remain attuned to the continued operations of state investments and violating practices related to the management of intimate arrangements. If a history of interracial relationships in the U.S. is one saturated with white supremacy and state political interests in maintaining its power, how might we focus our analysis of mixedness and interraciality in the present, *not* by the unveiling of historical and present multiraciality/interraciality but by unveiling the historical continuity of state investment and control in the constitution and arrangement of relations and forms of belonging, such that in recent years a category like ‘mixed status’ is manifest?

III. U.S./Mexico Border Relations and the Production of the ‘Alien’ Maternal and ‘Mixed Status’

In this section, I will turn to two arenas in which relations of ‘mixedness’ is manifest as ‘mixed status’ in discourses on immigration—the figure of the non-citizen, ‘alien’ maternal and of ‘mixed status’ relationships and families given present U.S. immigration and enforcement policies that motivate historic highs for deportations and “undocumented immigrants in the USA...staying

and becoming more integrated socially and economically.”³⁸⁰ I will first, however, discuss more specifically the history of U.S.-Mexico relations surrounding race.

Discussions of immigration today often center on enforcement of the U.S.-Mexican border, thus generating a discourse on immigration emergent from the experiences of Mexican non-citizens and those who are related to them. Historically, Mexicans in particular have had a strained relationship to the U.S. in regards to citizenship given geopolitical manifestations of power and discursive practice. This has produced fluid, multiple, and uncertain racialization effects for Mexicans in the U.S. as well as a tenuous position in regards to citizenship. Both racialization and citizenship processes inflect each other at the site of Mexican experience in the U.S. Historically, as referenced, with the Treaty of Guadalupe, Mexicans in the now-U.S. were granted formal citizenship as white, yet this was experienced as a second class citizenship wherein Mexicans were racialized as nonwhite in everyday experience. For example, “over the course of the mid-twentieth century” Mexican Americans were excluded from facets of everyday life based on “language and culture rather than race...[State officials] could not exclude (white) ‘Mexicans’ from juries and schools—but they could and did bar ‘Spanish speakers.’”³⁸¹ It’s not hard to see the connection of this practice to today, when we hear the racist retort that Mexicans should learn to ‘speak American.’³⁸² In 1954, the Supreme Court case *Hernandez v. Texas* recognized in juridical parlance this disconnect, stating that “Mexican Americans, whether or not they were legally white, had been treated as a “separate class . . . distinct from ‘whites.’”³⁸³ Today, still, it is hard to determine what that ‘separate class’ is—is it a racial group? An ethnic group? One based in

³⁸⁰ Dulce Medina and Cecilia Menjivar. (2015). “The Context of Return Migration: Challenges of Mixed-Status Families in Mexico’s Schools.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2123.

³⁸¹ Ariela J. Gross. (2008). *What Blood Won’t Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 254

³⁸² Matt Stevens. (2017). New Jersey Teacher Who Told Students to ‘Speak American’ Returns to School. *New York Times*. From <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/24/nyregion/speak-american-high-school.html>.

³⁸³ Gross (2008), 253.

citizenship or supposed citizenship status (e.g. an ‘undocumented,’ or ‘illegal’ class)? The debates concerning census designations illuminate this ambiguous feature of U.S. American racial classifications contemporarily. Presently, census designations have depicted Hispanic or Latino as solely an ethnicity, rather than a race, even within a larger social world in which many understand ‘Latino’ as a racial designation. Recently, however, there has been the push to combine these questions on the census, so that ‘Hispanic/Latino’ would be an option for one’s *racial* identity as well as their ethnic identity. The fact that this proposed change to the ‘Hispanic or Latino’ designation will likely lower the population of those counted as ‘white’ could “fuel some of the anxieties behind the white supremacist movement” as sociologist Ann Morning notes.³⁸⁴ And so, in this formal organization of racial groups, white supremacist types may favor the *incorporation* of the historically mixed race ethnic category of Latino or Hispanic *as white*, all the while manifesting an everyday social situation wherein those of Latino or Hispanic backgrounds experience a ‘non-white status.’ As Morning goes on to note, if given the opportunity to choose ‘Latino’ over ‘white’ for their race, many individuals might just say “‘You know, we just don’t feel like we’re being considered white. We don’t feel we’re treated this way. And so we’re going to look for another way to describe ourselves.’”³⁸⁵ Racial designation, both self- and institutionally- imposed, interact with dominant social mores and so, can ebb and flow based on the needs of that dominant social order. Evidenced here, we see how negotiations of power and status generate the use of different racial terms of identity and belonging. These terms themselves do not indicate liberatory (or even anti-liberatory) positions, but indicates the political order informing sociopolitical relations between people.

³⁸⁴ Hansi Lo Wang. (2017). “How the U.S. Defines Race and Ethnicity May Change Under Trump.” *NPR*. From <https://www.npr.org/2017/11/22/564426420/how-the-u-s-defines-race-and-ethnicity-may-change-under-trump>.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid*.

Within our dominant sociopolitical order, what has been maintained throughout various usages of distinct racial terms of belonging, however, is an overarching value associated with whiteness as a mode or means toward material and social status accumulation as well as cultural intelligibility and legitimation. This generates political effects and relations for racialized populations, as we see presently with those racialized as ‘Latino/a’ in the U.S. The effects of recent legislation and sentiment concerning the border have resulted in ‘mixed status’ relations and ‘alien’ maternal relations. What I wish to point out is how these designations are at risk of being naturalized when they are extracted from the social order in which they are birthed. Without the political understanding of the history of racializing practices concerning national belonging in the U.S., these become simply juridical categories, ‘givens’ that exist outside the violences that actually conditioned and condition them. At the same time, because of the more explicit political character of these representations of ‘mixed’ relations (rather than, perhaps, mixed race as a biological result of having two parents of ‘different races’), it is easier to understand how they could be understood through a political ontology of race. In centering these as what Alexander Weheliye calls “racializing assemblages,” or “a set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans”³⁸⁶ and placing them in conversation with ‘mixed race,’ we can move discourses on mixed race in the U.S. toward the frame of a political ontology wherein sociopolitical *relations* are centered in discussions of racial mixedness.

In today’s dominant social order, the experience of being in mixed citizenship status relationships and families often goes unnoticed and unacknowledged. It was not until 2000 that

³⁸⁶ Alexander G. Weheliye. (2014). *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Duke University Press:Durham, NC, 4.

the term began to appear more frequently in the literature³⁸⁷ and there is not much data on the numbers of mixed-citizenship status *couples* or *families* though “In 2010, 16.6 million people lived in a mixed-status family, that is, a family in which at least one member was unauthorized.”³⁸⁸ This phenomenon has repercussions for citizen and non-citizen individuals alike. The role of citizenship, as we’ve seen, is not just about granting rights or refusing them, but about a matrix of value wherein one’s proximity to non-citizenship has effects, which is why, as Jane Lilly López describes, U.S. citizens in mixed-status intimacies experience the contradiction and tenuousness of citizenship firsthand: “In theory, their legal rights as citizens remain intact after marrying noncitizens. In practice, many of these citizens feel relegated to a “second-class citizenship.”³⁸⁹ As Lopez thus argues, approaching citizenship as an “individual-centered concept,” as something an individual has or doesn’t have, is inadequate, both legally and theoretically. Additionally, as April Schueths describes, “anti-miscegenation laws have simply manifested themselves in a new way,” since “under federal immigration law Congress is permitted to discriminate against certain marriages between a U.S. citizen and an immigrant spouse, all in the name of protecting our nation from foreign powers.”³⁹⁰

Today we also witness a slew of discourses surrounding the ‘alien’ maternal body and the ‘threat’ of ‘anchor babies’ to the national constitution of the United States. As Natalie Cisneros writes, “The assumption of this discourse is that the [alien] maternal body contaminates the fetus so that its citizenship status when it becomes a born baby is questionable.”³⁹¹ This is a process of what she calls “backwards uncitizenship,” wherein political moves to repeal birthright citizenship

³⁸⁷ Dreby (2005), 191

³⁸⁸ Ibid, 5.

³⁸⁹ Jane Lilly López. (2015). “‘Impossible Families’: Mixed-Citizenship Status Couples and the Law.” *Law and Policy*. University of Denver. 37.1-2, 5.

³⁹⁰ Schueths (2015), 812.

³⁹¹ Natalie Cisneros. (2013). “‘Alien’ Sexuality: Race, Maternity, and Citizenship.” *Hypatia*. 28.2, 301.

guaranteed by the 14th amendment aim to “strip citizens of central freedoms of citizenship” (this is the ‘uncitizenizing’ part) while enacting this in a temporally ‘backwards’ sense, “appealing to a prior boundary of citizenship that particular bodies transgress.”³⁹²

In 2010 and 2011, as she describes, there was a swelling of legislative discourse on repealing the 14th amendment, that which guarantees ‘birthright’ citizenship. As Cisneros writes, “According to *The New York Times*, in January 2011 ‘legislators from five states opened a national campaign...to end the automatic granting of American citizenship to children born in the United States to illegal immigrants’ (Preston 2011)” and in 2010 “Fox News claimed that ‘lawmakers in at least 14 states announced...[that] they were working on legislation to deny U.S. citizenship to the children of illegal immigrants’ (Associated Press 2010).”³⁹³ Discourses on the ‘anchor baby’ phenomenon ‘incentivizing’ illegal immigration, particularly Mexican immigration, abound in conservative legislative and social circles. Cisneros understands this discourse to position “alienness” as “inheritable and essential”—“even if juridical discourse would constitute a subject as a ‘citizen’ from birth, her or his constitution as always-already alien (and thereby perverse and threatening) persists.”³⁹⁴ Therefore, we get “backwards uncitizenizing,” the move to strip away rights of citizenship from juridically-defined citizens through appeal to a temporally prior ‘transgression’ (in the figure of the ‘illegal’ mother) of borders and the nation.

These emergent terms suggesting relations of mixedness—‘mixed status’ and ‘alien maternal’—are birthed in a historical political order wherein practices of racial-national belonging continue to be manifest in *de facto* ways. It is therefore important to attend to the raciality of these terms of analysis and thus, to the ways in which they produce what we might call relations of

³⁹² Ibid, 303.

³⁹³ Ibid, 302.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

mixed raceness. In doing so, we can link discourses on mixed race and mixed status in ways that help illuminate the conceptual schemas and political relations informing these designations.

IV. 'Mixed Race' and 'Mixed Status'

My question in both of these cases in relation to contemporary mixed race politics is: how might we consider the problematic of 'mixed status'-ness and the 'alien maternity' as evidence *of* and a possibility *for* centering a political ontology of race in present day discourses and politics surrounding mixed race? This would foreground the question of *how* political structures make mixedness 'exist' and the political *effects* and *relations* they herald. Additionally, in linking mixed race and mixed status, we might ask: what possibilities for radical coalition work challenging state borders, ideologies of the nation, and white supremacy might arise? While I do not provide answers to these questions in this chapter, I pose them as a way to think beyond traditional discourses of mixed race and multiraciality in the U.S., since, as I have been advancing in this dissertation, any liberatory thought/politics regarding mixed race must attend to questions regarding the consolidation of (normative) representations of mixed race rather than attempt to mobilize those representations themselves.

Perhaps we can begin to see representations of mixed *race* and mixed *status* as concurrent and mutually inflected processes of state domination in legitimizing certain modes of relating and belonging so that the goal may be to develop new forms of relationality outside of and in opposition to present-day modes. The question I want to pose is how we might do this through the language and politics of 'mixedness'—mixed status and mixed race. We may, perhaps, find resources for

this type of political engagement in a radical politics of migration and a ‘counternarrative’ of citizen-subjectivity inspired by the ‘perverse alien citizen.’

As Cisneros shows, discourse on “backwards uncitizenizing” exceeds the juridical and showcases forms of power that “exposes the positing of a mythical preexisting category of ‘true,’ ‘moral’ or ‘natural’ citizenship that is prior to the ‘unnatural perversion’ of ‘birthright citizenship.’”³⁹⁵ Cisneros goes on to describe what I would call the *counternarrative* to citizen-subjectivity that backwards uncitizenizing uncovers—namely, that the ‘alien’ subject in this instance is not “simply... a former citizen, or even as a noncitizen, but [is] a perverse anticitizen” against which citizenship is constituted.³⁹⁶ It is this ‘monstrous’ citizen-subject position that, in its threat as ‘perverse alien subject,’ makes transparent the racist power system inherent in citizenship itself and in the process has the power to “[reform] the borders of citizenship itself.”³⁹⁷

What this reveals, Cisneros argues, is “the way that discourse surrounding the ‘problematic of alien sexuality’ operates in the racist constitution of citizenship itself.”³⁹⁸ Thus, in thinking about citizenship practices throughout U.S. history, we can see the ways in which the supposed ‘freedoms’ granted within this historical order are continually undermined and unable to exceed the logic of continuous symbolic and material violences against nonwhite bodies, human features, and forms of relation.

Citizenship is never a neutral or solely emancipatory right to gain. Instead, it is a politicized mode of belonging, such that participation in it is not only a matter of national belonging but also the production of human life—of who counts as part of the ‘Human family,’ and thus who is worthy of value, safety, and protection. It is a constant attempt to manage and control who counts

³⁹⁵ Ibid, 304.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Ibid, 303.

as the ‘Human family,’ where ‘Human family’ has become defined as having natural access to land, belonging, and a signifying *name* emergent from the power *to name*, to grant symbolic integrity to persons through white patrilineal power, as described by Hortense Spillers. These are racial logics concerning ‘humanity’ that are birthed in the particular historical order of racial slavery. We ought to consider how practices of naming citizenship status and naming race both rely on a distinction inaugurated within the historic ruptures of the slave trade, wherein a specific symbolic schema for intelligibility of human and cultural features and relations is manifest. This is a severing schema producing two classes: one providing a range of subject positions that cohere to meaningful and mobile personalities and another that serves to uphold the continuation of this mode of valuation.

Annie Menzel describes the current order of citizenship discourses in the U.S. through the language of a “white epistemology of citizenship” by way of Charles Mills’ articulation of the Racial Contract, or

the set of agreements, historically explicit and currently tacit, that divides the earth’s peoples into full persons—White—and subpersons—nonwhites—such that the latter are constitutive outsiders to the political, moral, and epistemological norms that structure the White social world³⁹⁹

According to Menzel, a white epistemology of citizenship is an amnesiac understanding of the histories of borders and violent struggle informing present day inequalities. It is a

U.S. citizenship peacefully contained within the United States’ ‘natural’ borders, composed of independent workers making their own way, inclusive of anyone with the requisite moral fiber: this is the managed memory that underpins and is in turn reinforced by, the White epistemology of citizenship.⁴⁰⁰

The history of racial exclusions and violent appropriations of land informing practices of U.S. border constitution and citizenship practices is effectively erased in this logic, producing a

³⁹⁹ Menzel, “Birthright Citizenship,” 29.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid, 45.

contemporary moment in which an amnesiac attack on birthright citizenship and a naturalization of logics of human illegality has been mounted. Reasserting the reality of citizenship as constituted through these racializing assemblages shows how the drive to claim citizenship itself may be inadequate in ways similar to the inadequacy of simply claiming mixed race identity as a way to destroy the social order predicated on a biracial schema of race.

Appeal to citizenship (or a citizen-subject position) for a politics of migration operates *within* a broader system of violence. Instead, generating a liberatory politics in this instance is going to be wildly different than declaring the juridical ‘right’ of citizenship to those undergoing processes of “uncitizenship” and will perhaps include what Nicholas de Genova describes as an “irreducible spirit of irreverence and disaffection for state power” founded in “an “irreversible,” “incorrigible,” “inextricable” migrant presence *within* U.S. social formation.⁴⁰¹ Extended to the conceptual level, this may include making apparent the fundamental organization of political relations of white supremacy and antiblackness that uphold the functioning of the state as the arbiter of protections by way of (racialized) citizenship. Once identified, we can seek the creative destruction/transformation of these relations for the purposes of liberatory thought and politics. In projecting a politics defiant and rejecting of “normative categories of state sovereignty and its immigration regime”⁴⁰² as well as normative approaches to ‘mixed race,’ we can perhaps witness the emergence of an insurgent ground of liberatory thought and action through a radical discourse on mixed race inclusive of ‘mixed status’ relations.

⁴⁰¹ Nicholas de Genova. (2010). “The Queer Politics of Migration: Reflections on ‘Illegality’ and Incorrigibility.” *Studies in Social Justice*. 4.2, 101.

⁴⁰² *Ibid*, 105.

Conclusion

On the Future of Mixed Race Studies: Mixedness as Cultural Resonance and Mode of Knowledge Production

I arrived to this dissertation project with the goal of challenging putative logics regarding mixed race—logics that assumed to know the ‘what,’ ‘when,’ and ‘how’ of race mixture. I did so because of what I found to be discourses in the U.S. surrounding multiraciality that presented naïve and superficial understandings of U.S. racial history, visions of identity, modes of engaging with the figure of the future, and what it would take to radically challenge our racial-social order. Over the last 30 years we’ve witnessed what I would call an anxiously hopeful and at times abundantly celebratory approach to mixed race within media, the academic field of mixed race studies (sometimes referred to as critical mixed race studies), and social movements related to mixed race/multiracialism. Conversations have surely become more nuanced since the late 1980s and early to mid 1990s in the U.S. when the contemporary field of mixed race studies was just beginning to form. Jayne Ifekwunigwe describes a shift from the late 20th century— ‘Age of Celebration,’ as she calls it, to today, an ‘Age of Critique’ of multiracial discourse. This marks the transformation from positions held by scholars such as Maria P. Root and Naomi Zack who claimed, respectively, that “The language of mixed race... may at this point be used to dismantle the racial system”⁴⁰³ and that mixed race identity would “[look] to the future rather than to the past [and be] founded on freedom and resistance to oppression rather than immanence and acceptance of tradition”⁴⁰⁴ to positions advanced by scholars such as Jared Sexton, Tavia Nyong’o, Michele Elam, and Minelle Mahtani, today, who each, in various ways, point out the reproduction of

⁴⁰³ Maria P. Root. (2003). “Five Mixed-Race Identities.” In *New Faces in a Changing America*. Edited by Loretta I. Winters. SAGE Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, 17.

⁴⁰⁴ Naomi Zack. (1993). *Race and Mixed Race*. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, PA, 163-164.

oppressions that occur in unreflective and absolutist embraces of a mixed race understood as the harbinger of a more liberatory future.

The distinction between the Age of Critique and that of Celebration, however, ought not represent such a stark temporal contrast. These two ‘ages’ both constitute our most recent present, and it is, in part, I think, still a task of the field of (critical) mixed race studies as a whole to distinguish to what extent ‘celebration’ is maintained *uncritically* in various ways within ‘critical’ discourses. By this, I mean to say that it is still very much an open question as to *what* degree and depth mixed race studies is able to accept criticism while still maintaining itself *as a field of study*. To what extent do the sharpest critiques, to which my project is partial, throw the whole endeavor of ‘critical’ mixed race studies into question? It is this brink to which the work of Jared Sexton brings us, where we must face the political question of language—what language one chooses to use and how to use it given the goal of liberatory thought and practice. Can a liberatory politics be forged through the language of ‘mixed race’? This is a question I ultimately answer in the affirmative while I think Sexton may answer in the negative. It is useful then, by way of conclusion, to revisit some overarching themes present in my study that in large part have been inspired by the work of Sexton while identifying areas where I think Sexton’s work can be further nuanced and extended.

I. Sexton’s Project Revisited

Sexton offers one of the most sustained and damning critiques of late 20th century multiracialism in the U.S. Throughout this dissertation, I have returned to Sexton’s claims to foreground the *centrality* of mixed race/multiraciality/interraciality to the U.S. racial order of

antiblackness and white supremacy and the politics of sexuality despite dominant discourses that position mixed race as requiring ‘liberation’ from—and in effect liberating—a suppressed past. Ultimately, in situating ‘mixedness’ as a conceptual necessity to the founding logics of racial domination, this dissertation has argued that any engagement with ‘mixed race’ in the present must directly wrestle with the interplay of systems of oppression—normative heterosexuality, exclusivist nationalism, white supremacy, and antiblackness—conditioning its emergence.

Today, most generally speaking, mixed race in the U.S. appears legible as the intermingling of races understood as distinct and/or the biological and cultural result of this intermingling. The ‘what’ of mixed race is the mixed race/multiracial/interracial person, coupling, family, or nation; the ‘how’ of mixed race is this ‘coming together’ of the races (that had been previously separated); and the ‘when’ of mixed race is located *within* the experience of said intermingling or as a result of such exchanges. In dominant contemporary U.S. discourses, ‘mixed race’ is assumed to be a self-evident, knowable category, awaiting recognition and further elaboration. Regardless of *how* one seeks to answer the ‘what,’ ‘when,’ and ‘how’ questions, the point is that these *appear* as *answerable*, as the questions that *demand* answering in our current social order. I have chosen a different project, however; one that asks questions that come prior and seeks to explode the social order from which they came. Questions that have framed my project include: How have discourses on mixed race/multiraciality/interraciality congealed over the past thirty years? What norms are operative within standard models of mixed race in the U.S.? How has the figure of mixed race operated in the sociocultural imaginary of the U.S. in recent decades? What conceptions of race and racism are assumed in dominant discourses on mixed race? From where does this desire to name, codify, recognize, and accept ‘mixed race’ come? Can we do something otherwise with ‘mixed race,’ rather than name, describe, and ‘rescue’ it from a suppressed past? In what ways has

mixed race been *fundamental* to racial formation in the U.S.? What will be required of discourses on mixed race in order to contribute to the project of liberatory thought and politics today?

These questions all oscillate around the question of the political: what social and political effects have discourses on multiracialism had in the U.S. and what potential effect might they have in the future? In the introduction, I discussed how we seem to be at an ideological crossroads wherein the racial demographic changes occurring in this nation and the projected futures that emerge from this have sparked anxieties and hopes concerning our sociopolitical racial order. On one end are those clearly racist anxieties that seek to hold on to the fantasy of the U.S. as a white, European nation. On the other are those hopes that envision changing demographics as a harbinger of racial justice, harmony, and liberation. Both are ideologies of the future that must presuppose numerous things in the present. My project has focused on the hopeful end of the spectrum, wherein the ‘promise’ of mixed race/multiraciality/interraciality has been expressed, I believe, in problematically absolute ways. These salvific narratives produce fantasies of the nation, as well, that must be tempered and more deeply historicized and politicized if we are to seek broader liberatory aims. This is why my project has been oriented around exploring the effects of ideologies of mixed race in the contemporary U.S., specifically those emanating from more celebratory approaches that I claim maintain a network of oppressions that must be countered in any liberatory endeavor of thought.

Similarly, Sexton’s *Amalgamation Schemes* critiques the “principle political effects of multiracialism” in a post Civil Rights Movement Era. Opposed to what multiracialism advocates might describe as its ability to radically confront the social order predicated on race and transform existing patterns of intergroup relations, Sexton describes a fundamental continuity of the “living legacies of white supremacy” that is reinforced by core tenets of multiracialism through its

disarticulation from racial blackness, promotion of normative sexuality, and evasions of history.

As Sexton writes in the introduction,

I argue that multiracialism...suffers from an assumptive logic that diminishes or conceals altogether the historicity of race and sexuality (Hodes 1999) and, more importantly, that displaces or disavows the protocols of violence that undergird the twin pillars of U.S. social formation: racial slavery and genocidal conquest (Blackburn 1998).⁴⁰⁵

My dissertation has sought to further expose these assumptive logics and resituate mixed race in the violent historical and present-day order of white supremacy and antiblackness. In the introduction and throughout, I discussed features of this order through a political ontology of race, which seeks to make apparent a conception of race via political effects and political relations generated through the transatlantic slave trade and racial slavery. This historical *rupture*, as Hortense Spillers argues, produced a material and symbolic schema and a logic for gaining cultural coherence, intelligibility, integrity, and legibility manifest through the sign of White Patrilineal Law and power. Discourses on multiracialism today cannot afford to eclipse this past and present day order.

Oftentimes, however, eclipsing this history is precisely the result of dominant discourses on multiracialism that have yet to fully engage with the historical realities of U.S. social formation. In this instance, as we saw in chapter one, we witness what I have called ‘historical posturing,’ wherein a feature of the past is narrowed in upon, amplified as exhaustive, and used as a foil in order to claim the moral high ground in the supposedly radically different present/future. In the case of mixed race, historical posturing is advanced through an understanding of racial history in the U.S. that positions the one drop rule as exhaustive. If the one drop rule manifested a rigid biracial schema through which racism was advanced in the U.S., effectively denying and suppressing discussion of ‘mixedness,’ then, as it is supposed, accepting and recognizing mixed

⁴⁰⁵ Sexton (2008), 4.

race in the present can challenge historical processes of racism. But as I show throughout this project, this is a faulty vision of history and a faulty understanding of racism, which impedes our ability to think critically about the role of ‘mixed race’ in contemporary U.S. sociopolitical formation.

As Sexton writes, “race mixture has been incorporated into the production of racial knowledge and racial order from the colonial era onward.”⁴⁰⁶ Opposed to scholars like Naomi Zack who presume that mixed race has primarily been suppressed in history since “[the existence of] mixed-race individuals is not recognized in the American biracial system,”⁴⁰⁷ the concept of racial mixedness has been a central feature of our racial social order. If we understand race not as the result of ‘faulty’ classification schemas, but as the continued *attempts* at naming and classifying within sociopolitical schemas that demand these attempts in order to gain cultural coherence and maintain signifying power, then we begin to understand how practices of identifying mixed race (and concomitant terms such as miscegenation, race mixture, etc.) plays into these logics. The concept of ‘race’ *needed* ‘mixed race,’ since, as Sexton describes, “The attempt to assert inalienable differences between the races, most notably those differences associated with sexual excess or degeneracy, ‘only took on significance’ *through* the image of ‘copulation, of couplings, fusing, coalescence, between races’” and so, “racial *differences* are elaborated out of the tableau of *mixture*; they depend on it for their articulation, their social existence, however tenuous and provisional⁴⁰⁸.” Following Sexton, we must reposition ‘race mixture’ as a “structural element of the fiction of race purity.”⁴⁰⁹ What this means is that instead of understanding mixed race as the

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid, 68.

⁴⁰⁷ Zack (1992), 143.

⁴⁰⁸ Sexton (2008), 34.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid, 20. It is important to note here that Sexton is not suggesting that there *is* mixture prior, through which race establishes itself, but that it is the image or representation of mixture through which race *as distinct classifications* is elaborated.

antithesis to a faulty conception and practice of race/racism, we understand it is a key concept for maintaining the racial social order of white supremacy and antiblackness. As Sexton writes,

The turbulence associated with scenes of interracial liaison or figures of the multiracial body within the contemporary political culture can be understood as providing the pivotal grounds upon which the ‘racializing project’ (Goldberg 1997) continuously reproduces its closures and classifications.⁴¹⁰

Race and mixed race, in this instance, needs to remain a “problem,” as Sexton writes, “if it is to remain at all.”⁴¹¹ That is, it needs to remain an issue functioning through the frame of recognition and identification in order to fuel logics upholding the historical order of white supremacy. It is a function of white supremacy and antiblackness, as Sexton argues, that ‘mixed race’ becomes a topic of question/concern/recognition/elaboration at all. And so any liberatory politics concerned with mixed race/multiraciality must concern itself with this. As he writes,

Rather than establishing themselves in vulgar opposition to miscegenation, *white supremacy and antiblackness produce miscegenation* as a precious renewable resource, a necessary threat against which they are constructed, a loyal opposition, a double exposure. They rely upon miscegenation to reproduce their social relations; their relations are, in fact, this very reproduction.⁴¹²

Not only is ‘race mixture’ posed problematically as a response *to* racism in contemporary discourses of multiracialism (rather than a structural element within it) but in order for it to emerge as such, we must presuppose “[a] politics of interracial sexuality” that is “fundamental to racial formation” and is the “field for its production, contestation, and containment,”⁴¹³ but one that is continually evaded in present discourses on multiracialism. I show this in chapter three and explore the possibilities for ‘queering’ mixed race and the sociopolitical order it presently upholds through a revised temporal-historical schema. One must address the politics of ‘interracial sexuality’—as

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Ibid, 5.

⁴¹² Ibid, 25.

⁴¹³ Ibid, 15.

both a “material practice and discursive formation”⁴¹⁴—in order to understand the role of the figure of ‘the multiracial’ today, but in dominant renderings, this figure is used retroactively to grant legibility and integrity to the interracial (heterosexual) relationship in a way that is devoid of robust historical situating. The valorization of the happy, healthy, mixed race progeny is used to validate the interracial (normatively heterosexual) couple form, but without reference to the histories of terrorization by way of sexualized violence that germinated race as we know it in the U.S. Racial slavery and its manifestation of property relations and exploitations of sexuality created the problematic wherein white supremacy and antiblackness could be maintained through attempts to identify the ‘when’ and ‘where’ of miscegenation, effectively managing those political relations which gave rise and continue to give rise to patterns of racial domination.

When discourses on multiraciality *do* address the matter of history, it is often by way of expressing the need to recover, recuperate, or restore U.S. racial history by way of recognizing that nation’s status as historically ‘multiracial.’ As discussed in chapter four, the work of Ronald Sundstrom is paradigmatic in this regard. In outlining what he claims to be ‘responsible’ multiracial politics, he advocates a politics of ‘repair’ which involves responding to the ‘ruptures’ of the nation that gain visibility at the site of multiracial people, who, in their existence are thought by Sundstrom to be “living symbols of the rupture of racial-sexual mores and divisions.”⁴¹⁵ It is the divisions generated by these ‘racial-sexual mores’ that demand repair, according to Sundstrom. Part of this repair, he argues, involves multiracial people ‘remembering their mothers’ and the nation as a whole ‘unveiling the myth’ of a ‘monoracial nation’ and admitting and celebrating its roots of “actual multiracial families,”⁴¹⁶ of which Sundstrom cites the families of the nation’s

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ Ronald R. Sundstrom. (2008). *The Browning of America and the Evasion of Social Justice*. State University of New York Press: New York, NY, 116.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid, 105.

forefathers, such as Thomas Jefferson's 'family.' This appeal to history is inadequate given its marshaling of terminology of 'multiracial' and 'interracial' as a means to unveil the 'truth' of the nation, since, following Sexton, miscegenation is not an antidote to white supremacy and antiblackness, but the latter "*produce miscegenation* as a precious renewable resource....[and] rely upon miscegenation to reproduce their social relations."⁴¹⁷

Positioning the recognition of 'multiraciality' in our past and in/as our future as a nation, as Sundstrom does, is lacking in that, as Sexton writes, "It threatens the racial schema from within but does not seek to challenge the regime of definition that white Anglo racism paints in such bright lines" seeking instead "merely to refine or reconfigure the apparatus, to establish a space for the full play of multiracial identity or a race-transcendent humanity."⁴¹⁸ This is "a battle within the bounds of the strategic field, contained by the fear of being undone by or losing itself in the struggle."⁴¹⁹

Sexton's damning critique of multiracialism discourses begs the question of whether there is any 'hope' or redemption of the terms of multiraciality themselves or if they are all determining and the task remains one of developing the theoretical architecture to reveal this determination rather than developing a liberatory lexicon wherein mixed race can be productively used. While I am not sure if Sexton would agree to such absolutist terms of the debate in the first place, I think his work shows a strong aversion to the latter as political praxis, especially given the last quote referenced. Will any attempt to name 'mixed race' through a liberatory lexicon ultimately fail given the pressures of cohesion and intelligibility? In this dissertation, I have aimed to make space for a liberatory lexicon of 'mixed race,' but one that cannot be built *upon* a solidified or fully

⁴¹⁷ Sexton (2008), 25.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, 223.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

intelligible position of mixed race. Instead, as I suggest in what is to follow, we might understand a liberatory politics of mixed race through its cultural resonance and as a mode of knowledge production. First, however, I will outline Sexton's conclusions on a future for discourses on 'multiracialism.'

II. The Future of Mixed Race: Sexton's Conclusions

Sexton's project is distinctly one of critique. He aims to show the problematic political effects of contemporary discourses on multiraciality that emerge out of the late 20th century multiracial movement in the U.S. But it is unclear what is to follow, politically, from such a critique. At times, Sexton seems to leave open space for a qualified politics of mixed race. At others, it seems clear that any appeal to mixed race/multiraciality/interraciality is a play "within the bounds of a strategic field."⁴²⁰ For instance, in the introduction, Sexton appears to leave the door open for an engagement with 'mixed race' that can adequately respond to the critiques he will lay out. He claims that by "Refocusing the historic violence of racial slavery as an 'allegory of the present' (Hartman 1997)" and "distinguishing interracial sexuality from the heterosexual matrix of breeding" we might be able to take "steps toward a rethinking of race and mixed race appropriate to the contemporary scene."⁴²¹ Recognizing the continuity of the violences of white supremacy across U.S. racial history and seeking an approach to 'interracial sexuality' beyond the normativity of heterosexual biological reproduction are "indispensible" as Sexton describes, to any liberatory engagement with mixed race. Sexton does not seem interested in taking up this project himself, however. As he closes *Amalgamation Schemes*, it appears that the language of

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Ibid, 9.

‘mixed race’ or multiracialism is not enough and given his critiques of its investment in logics of white supremacy and antiblackness, another lexicon of race and liberatory politics in the U.S. will have to take its place. He points in the direction of the radical black tradition and radical black feminist theorizing to argue for the ‘blackening’ of the world. He concludes that only by humanity experiencing a ‘blackened world’ (à la Lewis Gordon) can we find a “way out of this racial wonderland” that is multiracial discourse in the U.S.⁴²²

Though he seems to ultimately embrace the language of ‘blackness’ and ‘blackening,’ Sexton does offer the ‘event of miscegenation’ as a heuristic we might interpret as allowing for a use of the terms of ‘mixed race’ in ways that make apparent and challenge problematic political effects of standard multiracialism discourses in the process. To recall, the event of miscegenation is the name Sexton gives to what he distinguishes from “interracial sex acts or the presence of mixed-race people.”⁴²³ In a way, miscegenation as event is the placeholder for that which exceeds apprehension and comprehension. It is, for Sexton, what “cannot be represented, conceptualized, or apprehended in either the interracial liaison or the multiracial body but rather is that which prevents either appearance from attaining a fixed and stable meaning, whether as object of aggression or desire.”⁴²⁴ It is the “outside of racialization” that “cannot itself be comprehended by the racializing project,” as Sexton describes.⁴²⁵ In this way, it cannot offer itself as “positive presence...but only as an absence that pulls us far away from itself as possible, receding into the sign it makes to draw one toward it (as though it were possible to reach it)’ (Foucault 1987, 28).”⁴²⁶ Sexton expresses the difficulty of articulating an alternative theoretical position of miscegenation

⁴²² Ibid, 257.

⁴²³ Ibid, 39.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Ibid, 221.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

given that “as we think of [miscegenation] now—the mixture of preconstituted races—[it] is only intelligible from the perspective of a culture in which antimiscegenation is *already* constitutive.”⁴²⁷

Sexton, and his readers, must try and imagine a world outside of this lens, but as he continues,

Whatever we imagine to happen before, beyond, beneath, or between meaningful categories of interracial sex or multiracial identity is *not* the event of miscegenation strictly speaking. Our retroactive projections, filtered through this lens, miss the point in the very attempt to grasp it.⁴²⁸

One must try and suspend the racial logics that constitute sense-making itself, which is no easy task, and perhaps one that will ultimately fail. Indeed, as I interpret it, we must begin from a point in which ‘interracial sex’ and ‘multiracial identity’ are *not* meaningful categories upon which we can stage our analysis; rather, we must suspend their intelligibility as objects of analysis *in order to* seek a “new semantic field” à la Spillers.

As Sexton concludes *Amalgamation Schemes*, it becomes clearer the extent to which mixed race/multiraciality is salvageable as a field of study through which a politically liberatory lexicon can be built. In the final instance, Sexton claims that “the project of a radical black feminism” is the “*only* viable—that is to say, ethically consistent—means of unraveling that ‘single bundle of nerves’ in which the violence of race, nation, class, gender, and sexuality ‘does not bear distinction’ (330).”⁴²⁹ As Sexton writes, and I will quote at length here:

The semi-illiteracy of conventional rhetoric shaping the dominant discourse on ‘race’ encourages our ‘severing racism from its logical culmination in genocide’ (James 1996a, 115), misrecognizing its origination in the violent formation of the modern commodity-form. It encourages as well our forgetting about its embedment in the seizure and theft of body whose anxious figure opened our considerations and whose effacement, in the first and last instance, makes possible the historical sensibility of the emergent multiracial imagined community: the dispossessed black female confronted, invented, by the slave estate and its undead symbolic mechanisms. That is to say, finally, that the critical gesture under pursuit seeks no more, and no less, than the potential legibility unleashed by the project of a radical black feminism, the insurgent ground of a political movement that

⁴²⁷ Ibid, 222.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Ibid, 258.

‘might rewrite after all a radically different text for female empowerment’ (Spillers 2003, 229).⁴³⁰

It appears that after Sexton’s critique of multiracialism, we are left with the task of “rethinking...race and mixed race appropriate to the contemporary scene”⁴³¹ which, as Sexton claims, can come about through recourse to the ‘unthinkable’—the ‘event’ of miscegenation and the radical black tradition in its seeking of a ‘blackened’ world. Radical black feminism, according to Sexton, is the only project that can carry forth the political task with which he leaves us: “neither a restoration nor a restitution, but a creative destruction.”⁴³²

II. Mixed Race as Cultural Resonance and Mode of Knowledge Production

I am persuaded by much of Sexton’s claims and conclusions, but the work of this dissertation has involved taking a slightly different tack, embracing the language of ‘mixedness’ in the final instance as that which we cannot escape or let go. Rather, we need to work through this language, reconstituting it and reconstituting the field of sense-making and intelligibility in the process. Like Sexton’s, my project has been largely one of critique, but it ultimately leaves space for and heralds the use of ‘mixed race’ and related terms *outside* the bounds of this field, outside of this sociopolitical racial order. But, as I hope to have shown, this demands that we attend primarily to the transformation of existing political relations of this order, rather than defining and describing a ‘critical’ mixed race *position*. It demands the development of more liberatory forms

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid, 9.

⁴³² Ibid, 258.

of relating and belonging, which, I think, can in part be instigated by/through the language of a radically re-conceived ‘mixed race.’

My project, in building off the work of Sexton, offers attempts at rethinking ‘mixed race’ and related terms through a resituating of the field of its enunciation. I have aimed to show how *if* mixed race is going to have any liberatory valence, it will need to be used in ways against the grain of ‘common’ sense, in ways that indicate and instigate a radically different social order. It will need to assume as its goal first and foremost the radical remaking of social and political relations against the grain of founding logics of the racial nation-state. In chapter one and two, respectively, I provided a critique of the appeals to history and the uses of identity that form standard approaches to mixed race in the contemporary U.S. scene. As I suggested, we need to place the concept of mixed race/race mixture as *central* to the history of race-making practices in the U.S. and in so doing, understand how simply the recognition or elaboration of mixed race identity is inadequate for challenging racial domination. Instead of foregoing ‘mixed race identity’ entirely, however, I have shown how we might radically reconceive what we mean or what could be meant by ‘identity’ in the service of liberatory thought and politics. In later chapters, I build on a positive project that attempts to think ‘mixed race’ outside the ‘bounds of a strategic field’ of enunciation. In this latter half, then, I looked particularly at the potentials for thinking outside the bounds of standard approaches to history and temporality as well as ideologies of race and the nation that inform our particular social order. My aim has largely been to direct attention to the contingency and multivalence of processes of racialization across U.S. history while foregrounding the continuities of an ongoing racial system predicated on determining the type and extent of one’s relation to violence and vulnerability. Given the depths to which our social order is structured by the predicaments of a political ontology of race, the forms of sense-making we must institute might

very well amount to ‘non-sense’ or what I would like to call ‘dis-sense,’ by which I mean the undoing or scattering of sense. In speaking of the queerness of mixed race via ‘inheritance’ or drawing comparisons between ‘mixed race’ and ‘mixed status,’ I have attempted to experiment with the destruction of forms of sense informing our racial social order.

Overall, ‘mixed race’ needs to signify outside of or beyond a term of reference via a descriptive register. Instead, as I aimed to make space for in this dissertation, it needs to be thought of via what we might call its ‘cultural resonance.’ This would involve how it functions in and feeds a certain system of cultural valuation within the frame of U.S. cultural imaginary. A major impetus of the multiracial movement was the will to ‘truth’ and ‘accuracy’ of one’s racial designation. Political projects of this sort demanded public recognition and the right to self-identify as a means for racial ‘justice’ and ‘fairness.’ But what this neglected to take into account was the will to racial definition and description in the first place that was/is indicative of the racial social order we have been living. Even today, many scholarly discourses on mixed race that expressly seek qualified positions on the import of mixed race identity in a social world structured by racism and white supremacy are oriented by the impetus to ‘get it right,’ to ‘capture’ a liberatory notion of mixed race through definition and description. Opposed to this, I have argued that we need not nor should we concede the discourse on mixed race to the discourse of a racial ‘subject position’ or identity through a descriptive register, especially one that advocates ‘accuracy’ as a means by which a liberatory politics is advanced. What I mean by this is that we ought not begin from assumptions concerning the ‘thing-ness’ of mixed race, as if it names or brings into being something *actual*, a distinct category of positivist analysis. Our racial grammars today seem to demand the figure of ‘mixed race’ (or any figure of racial signification) to come in the form of a subject type that one can discuss alongside other racial subject types. The drive to description is strong and has largely

come in the form of physiological description of what makes the mixed race subject *mixed race*. Think here of the emphases of parentage and phenotype/skin tone as two main vectors for identifying ‘mixed race.’ But as Spillers describes, “once fixated on the physiological, discourse then raids [mixed race⁴³³] for ideological purposes,”⁴³⁴ and the cultural resonance of mixed race, by which I mean its significance as operative within the logic of our racial political order, is made elusive.

The event of miscegenation as expressed by Sexton is incredibly helpful here in provoking the constant reminder that race does not come from outside and “corrupt otherwise natural human relations, sexual or otherwise” but it “*founds a culture* of antiblackness,” as he writes, “that alternatively scorns the dangers and celebrates the potentials of miscegenation as a *form of value*, that is, as instrumental or interpretable acts of interracial sex or meaningful multiracial bodies, predicates of the sentence of racialization, images of race.”⁴³⁵ Racism and antiblackness operates through its social, psychic, and material investments in reproducing its own power through designating forms of value and cultural intelligibility. As Sexton writes, “Racial difference *issues* from direct relations of force—the scales of coercion—and is only elaborated or *institutionalized* within relations of power—the scales of consent.”⁴³⁶ A political ontology, as I’ve been advancing, is integral for understanding the ways in which asking if race is ‘real’ or not is the wrong question. It is no doubt *felt* and expressed on bodies—as Sexton describes, in “the relation one suffers and/or enjoys with respect to the state-sponsored social organization of violence and sexuality”⁴³⁷—but it is not a ‘thing’ we should understand as ‘actual’ or a ‘fact.’ It is not representable, but is the

⁴³³ Spillers is discussing the specific literary figure of the mulatto/a here. For the purposes of terminological consistency I substitute ‘mixed race’ here.

⁴³⁴ Hortense J. Spillers. (2003). “Peter’s Pan: Eating in the Diaspora.” In *Black, White, and In Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, 27,

⁴³⁵ Sexton (2008), 220.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid*, 9.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid*.

continued manifestation of a culture with certain ‘matrices of value’ and modes of intelligibility that (re)produce its drive and ability *to* name.

Within literature, the trope of miscegenation is one instance wherein appeals to miscegenation/mixed race can be interpreted *not* as naming a subject type, but as Stefanie K. Dunning argues, articulating a “state of mind.”⁴³⁸ As Dunning describes,

If it is true that race is a social construction, and indeed it is, miscegenation is something that happens in the frontal lobe—not something that happens between bodies. Hence, it occurs not so much *between* bodies as *within* them. Identifying miscegenation as an interior operation, rather than a description of an external act, permits the realization that miscegenation is always a metaphor and never a(n) (f)act.⁴³⁹

As a symbol, metaphor, and trope in black literature, Dunning suggests that ‘miscegenation’ stages questions about blackness and black identity and changing notions therein. It signals that a “remaking of race is under way in the text that employs it.”⁴⁴⁰ And opposed to the “presumed deracinating power of miscegenation,” she argues, as literary device ‘miscegenation’ “is used to stage questions about race, authenticity, and belonging.”⁴⁴¹

The goal of approaching mixed race today via criticism of its dominant discourses and principle political effects must be to bring into being the space of discussion regarding mixed race and liberatory politics that works at the level of cultural resonance, which requires a deeply historicizing and politicizing orientation to the task at hand. In rejecting this assumption about the ‘being’ of mixed race, the hope is that we might build other lexicons and logics concerning racial mixedness that move us in a more liberatory direction.

⁴³⁸ Stefanie K. Dunning. (2009). *Queer In Black and White: Interraciality, Same Sex Desire, and Contemporary African American Culture*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington, IN, 11.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid, 17.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid, 11.

One way to continue this work is to forge discourses on mixed race that understand racial mixedness as instantiating a method or a mode of knowledge production. Alexander Weheliye provides a helpful distinction between understanding a field's primary objects of knowledge as being the study of a certain type of people "as real subjects" versus it being the study of an "articulated object of knowledge."⁴⁴² In the case of black studies, Weheliye insists on understanding blackness not as identified with "black people as real subjects (just as the human and Man appear as synonymous in western modernity)" but as associated with "a mode of knowledge production [that] provides the conditions of possibility for viewing race as a set of articulated political relations or assemblages, and not a biological or cultural descriptor."⁴⁴³ Appealing to the work of Sylvia Wynter, Weheliye describes "black studies and minority discourse as liminal spaces, simultaneously ensconced in and outside the world of Man, from which they construct new objects of knowledge."⁴⁴⁴ My goal in this project has been to open space for mixed race studies akin to this portrayal of black studies. This is not to argue for distinct discourses with different projects, but to claim a certain style of knowledge production that mixed race studies must be engaged in if it is to be a discourse continually seeking liberatory forms of relating and belonging. 'Critical' mixed race studies must disconnect itself from a starting point that assumes an understanding of mixedness as identified with 'mixed people' as real subjects. Instead, mixedness ought to be the mode of knowledge production that provides the conditions of possibility for illuminating existing political relations manifest through patterns of racial domination and generating 'new objects of knowledge' in the form of new modes of relating and belonging.

⁴⁴² Alexander G. Weheliye. (2014). *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Duke University Press:Durham, NC, 19.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid, 25.

By way of conclusion, I want to turn to a section of an interview between Saidiya Hartman and Frank Wilderson wherein the two theorists comment on Hartman's methodology as a historian of racial slavery to explore this approach to knowledge production as a potential model for studies of mixed race. In "The Position of the Unthought," Wilderson, in commenting on Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection*, praises the work in its refusal to represent "some kind of coherent, hopeful solution to things" given the "strength and terror of their evidence"⁴⁴⁵ that racial oppression has endured, dispersed, and amplified rather than dissipated. As Wilderson continues, "it does not allow the reader to think there was a radical enough break to reposition the black body after Jubilee. That is a tremendous and courageous move."⁴⁴⁶ Hartman's method of refusal lends support to a movement of thought that challenges standard forms of sense-making or liberatory narrative structure. For instance, often, in moving from critique, one is pressed to offer a positive project, solution, or alternative to take the place of or transform the object of critique, but Hartman, in reflecting on her work, understands her form of 'critique' not so much as an attempt to destroy the 'object' of said critique but to destroy the social order through which it emerges by destroying the forms of sense-making upon which it rests. As Hartman states,

What I was trying to do as a historian was to narrate a certain impossibility, to illuminate those practices that speak to the limits of most available narratives to explain the position of the enslaved. On the one hand, the slave is the foundation of the national order, and, on the other, the slave occupies the position of the unthought. So what does it mean to try to bring that position into view without making it a locus of positive value, or without trying to fill in the void? So much of our political vocabulary/imaginary/desires have been implicitly integrationist even when we imagine our claims are more radical.⁴⁴⁷

I am interested in the meta-theoretical musings of Hartman, so I will focus on this rather than the content of her particular theorization on enslavement. I want to draw comparisons based on her

⁴⁴⁵ Saidiya Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson III (2003). "The Position of the Unthought." University of Nebraska Press. *Qui Parle*. 13.2, 183.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid, 184.

method of thinking and narrating ‘the slave’ for a method of thinking the figure of mixed race or ‘the multiracial.’ As Hartman describes, her task in *Scenes of Subjection* was to narrate a certain impossibility of explaining the position of the enslaved. Similarly, the task of further conceptual work in critical mixed race studies ought not be a narration of mixed race in the form of narrating a “locus of positive value” or of “filling the void.” This has indeed been what much work over the past 30 years in the U.S. has sought to do—recognize and/or describe a position of mixed race that was thought to be liberatory. But as I hope to have shown, assuming that a firm break with the racial order can be advanced through a logic of recovery and recognition of mixed race/multiraciality/interraciality in the U.S. reproduces forms of sense-making of the sociopolitical order and the range of oppressions therein, that we ought to contest. The sort of theoretical movement to name, recover, repair, and otherwise feature mixed race through a recuperative-descriptive register or as a particular subject position is detrimental to the task of liberatory thought and politics. The task at hand is not, as Hartman describes, “the desire for inclusion within the limited set of possibilities that the national project provides.”⁴⁴⁸ The ways in which mixed race has been explored have largely been through this circumscribed mode of theoretical possibilities. The task must be primarily to attend to the relations and conditions of the sociopolitical order itself, featuring any discussion of mixed race within this theoretical starting point.

In reflecting on her own project of thinking ‘the slave’ and standard metrics of freedom that tend to impose on this theoretical venture, Hartman states, “Once you realize [the given language of freedom’s] limits and begin to see its inexorable investment in certain notions of the subject and subjection, then it no longer becomes that which rescues the slave from his or her former condition, but the site of the re-elaboration of that condition, rather than its

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid, 185.

transformation.”⁴⁴⁹ The aim cannot be to ‘rescue’ mixed race from a suppressed past, to name it and describe it within the confines of an order that is structured *by* the demand to name racial subject positions. Instead, one must seek to ‘re-elaborate the condition’ of mixed race in the present. This is where I find, contra Sexton, that ‘critical’ mixed race studies can maintain an ‘edge,’ so to speak, *through* the terms of mixed race. Sexton is helpful in this regard with his articulation of the event of miscegenation, but we need a way of speaking about mixed race beyond the language of an ‘absent presence.’ We must maintain it as signifying a ‘cultural resonance’ and ‘mode of knowledge production,’ and ultimately as a way to approach the problematic of the ‘unrepresentable’ that does not seek representation, but rather, forms of relating and belonging that in *their* existence, challenge the fundamental logics undergirding the sociopolitical order.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

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