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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS

Department of English and American Literature

Dissertation Examination Committee:

Rafia Zafar, Chair

Heidi Ardizzone

William Maxwell

Vivian Pollak

Abram Van Engen

The Heart of Whiteness: Interracial Marriage and White Masculinity in American Fiction,
1830-1905

by

Lauren M. W. Barbeau

A dissertation presented to the
Graduate School of Arts & Sciences
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

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Lauren M. W. Barbeau

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Introduction

The Un-Making of a White Man: The Marriage Contract and Intermarriage

Whiteness studies resounds with statements that claim that whiteness maintains supremacy through its invisibility as a category and its marginalization of nonwhites. George Lipsitz defines whiteness as the “unmarked category against which difference is constructed,” and Cheryl Harris similarly notes that “whiteness has been characterized not by an inherent unifying characteristic, but by the exclusion of others deemed to be ‘not white’” (Harris 36, Lipsitz 1). Michael Moon and Cathy Davidson elaborate, explaining, “Groups designated as Other are always susceptible to discrimination and exclusion from full citizenship within the nation or deprived of their constitutional rights” (4). Defining who these “Other” groups are, Frances Smith Foster writes, “Women and people of color became the Other, the means by which white men could know what they were by asserting what they were not” (11). These definitions of whiteness share an emphasis on absence and negation; rather than a set of positive attributes, whiteness defines itself by its opposite. Foster concludes that the exclusion of the “Other” enabled the “founding fathers [to bring] forth upon this continent a new nation dedicated to the proposition that all white men are created approximately equal” (11). While such definitions help make whiteness (and masculinity) a visible category of identity rather than the invisible standard against which other identities are measured, they nonetheless suggest the existence of a blanket whiteness that encompasses all who do not manifest characteristics of the “Other.” These studies have yet to consider how whiteness as an identity relies on the othering of its own deviant members to maintain a strong sense of what it is not.

In this dissertation, I consider how white masculinity maintained its boundaries in the nineteenth century by transforming nonconformist white men into the “Other,” thereby perpetuating the myth of a monolithic white masculinity that stabilized an otherwise fragile identity and made white supremacy possible. As Matthew Frye Jacobson writes, “Caucasians are not born [...]; they are somehow made” (3). Though scholars of whiteness have addressed at length how Caucasians are “made,” they have yet to question sufficiently if or how Caucasians can be unmade.¹ If one can become white, however, then one can become “not white;” the process, as nineteenth-century literature reveals, is reversible. My work fills this gap in scholarship by examining literature spanning from the 1830s to the early 1900s that suggests one method by which a white man can be unmade: interracial marriage. I argue that interracial marriage produces an “ineffaceable stain” upon white men in American literature (Howells, “Editor’s Study” 828). This stain marks the offending man as deviant and brings with it a series of repercussions that follow from the loss of a white identity.

My analysis turns toward a genre of fiction familiar to scholars of nineteenth-century American literature. Since the 1980s, the tragic mulatta genre has risen in popularity among scholars of African American women and identity. Tragic mulatta plots typically feature a near-white heroine who is courted by a white man and installed as his wife, either legally or, due to miscegenation laws, more frequently by mutual consent. Later, she discovers herself to be the descendant of a slave woman and is remanded to slavery or succumbs to death. The growing body of work that has now been done on the role and significance of the mulatta character, particularly in African-American-authored fiction, has allowed me to direct my attention toward

¹ In addition to Jacobson, see Theodore Allen’s *Invention of the White Race*, Noel Ignatiev’s *How the Irish Became White*, George Lipsitz’s *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, Michael Omni and Howard Winant’s *Racial Formation in the United States*, and David Roediger’s *Wages of Whiteness* for more information on the development of white identity.

her less-noticed white male counterpart, a figure I term the white suitor.² These narratives of interracial marriage are just as equally invested in white male identity as they are in black female identity. Eve Allegra Raimon's argument that novels in this vein are fundamentally about the mixed-race woman's identity has allowed me to consider how these novels deal with white male identity. Raimon claims that the tragic mulatta plot added to women's fiction "the overlay of slavery, miscegenation, and the prevailing crisis of national identity, making the figure the perfect emblem for exploring racial hybridity amid a newly 'motherless' and embattled body politic" (8). Her argument hinges upon the notion that the mulatta figure exploded in popularity during the 1850s because her mixed-race body provided a means of thinking and talking about the increasingly mixed-race nation. My works in tandem with arguments like Raimon's by suggesting that these plots could alternately use the white suitor to represent a nation that considered itself white coming into intimate contact with the racial other and to depict the ensuing identity crisis. Authors like Lydia Maria Child welcomed this identity crisis and saw in it the possibility for an egalitarian nation to emerge, but African American authors William Wells Brown and Frank J. Webb imagined there would be a backlash to interracial intimacy. In their novels, the white suitor's identity crisis becomes a social and political crisis that leads to the progressive suspension of his democratic rights as a white man. These punishments, as Margaret

² Werner Sollors has written extensively about the tragic mulatta and mixed-race identity. Perhaps because he argues that literary shifts in focus "from interracial (or mixed-status) founding couples to biracial descendants, from parents to their children, and from slavery to race [...] were central to the rise of the figures that have become known collectively as the 'Tragic Mulatto,'" he largely overlooks the role of white men in tragic mulatta plots (222-223). Teresa Zackodnik has more recently demonstrated how black women writers used the tragic mulatta figure to explore the performative aspects of race. Instead of seeing the tragic mulatta genre as a convention that more accurately reflects the concerns of the white women who invented it, as Jean Fagan Yellin and Karen Sánchez-Eppler have argued, Zackodnik views black women's use of the genre as a political device that enabled them to enter debates on the identity and position of black women in the nation (xvi). In *The Coupling Convention*, Ann duCille briefly touches on the role of white men in William Wells Brown's *Clotel*, but her interest lies more in African American romantic couplings than in interracial relationships. For more information on tragic mulatta studies, see also Jean Fagan Yellin's *Women and Sisters*, Hazel Carby's *Reconstructing Womanhood*, and Tess Chakalalak's *Novel Bondage*.

Holmes Bates and Thomas Dixon, Jr. make clearer in their postbellum novels, serve to defend America's white identity by expelling the man who tries to break down its boundaries. At stake in interracial marriage fiction is not simply the mulatta woman's mixed-race identity or the husband's white male identity; at stake is the nation's unstable identification as white. Though these authors differed in their desire to bolster or defeat this national whiteness, they nonetheless engaged the national belief that "this is a white man's country" through the white suitor (Bates 138).

I argue that interracially married white men are labeled as deviant by other whites in nineteenth-century fiction because they violate what I call the marriage contract. Marriage contract is not a new term. Eva Saks, for instance, defines it as "law's mechanism for the transmission of property," an agreement that "formalizes the parties' social relation [and] represents to the world their relationship to property" (69). My use of the term differs in that I expand this contract to include not only an agreement between spouses but between white men and the nation as well. I conceptualize the marriage contract as a three-way agreement between man, woman, and nation that ensured white-white marriage in exchange for democratic rights. In return for producing white heirs for the nation, white men received rights for their dependents as well as an expansion of their own privileges. To ensure that property and privilege remained white, the nation only guaranteed democratic rights to white men who married white women.³

³ Marriage to a white woman did nothing to stop white men from keeping slave mistresses. Neither, Pascoe states, did "laws against interracial marriage [...] prevent masters from having sex with slave women or having mixed-race children, both of which were common occurrences. Rather, they prevented masters from turning slaves they slept with into respectable wives who might claim freedom, demand citizenship rights, or inherit family property" (27). A legitimate marriage only made white male infidelities more socially acceptable because it confirmed his commitment to white supremacy, proving that he had no intentions of showering his nonwhite lover with the benefits of legal wifehood. These laws further served to stigmatize white men who did seek to elevate "slaves they slept with" to the position of "respectable wives" for the purpose of granting them legal privileges reserved for whites. Rachel Moran adds, "Antimiscegenation laws established the norm that interracial attraction was pathological and deviant, not natural and loving [....] Statutes characterized [...] interracial marriage as so

The nation functioned as a third party in the marriage, ensuring and legitimizing what I call the marriage contract. Marriage, as “the legal creation of a property relation, and the institution where reproduction was legitimated, [...] was the subject policed most vigilantly by miscegenation law,” according to Saks (66). The marriage contract constituted one form of policing by determining which white men had access to privilege. Peggy Pascoe writes that “marriage [...] links citizens and their dependents to the state,” creating bonds of responsibility between the nation and the white man’s dependents (Pascoe 2).⁴ Interracial marriage threatened to connect nonwhites to the benefits of citizenship, and consequently, men who engaged in such dangerous behaviors had to be excluded from the benefits of citizenship reserved for whites. The marriage contract does not define whom a man can marry. Instead, it defines whom he cannot marry. Scholars have neglected to note that a white male identity does not permanently guarantee democratic rights. Fulfillment of the marriage contract guarantees these rights and therefore is the ultimate confirmation or denial of a white identity. In the tragic mulatta genre, authors explored interracial marriages and their penalties for white men, revealing the privileges of white masculinity to be contingent upon a certain set of actions and, more importantly, underscoring the always-precarious nature of white supremacy.

This project differentiates intermarriage from interracial sex, focusing primarily on marriage rather than sex, in part because previous scholarship often conflates the two. As Pascoe makes clear, much of this conflation in scholarship stems from legal and historical rhetoric that

inappropriate that it jeopardized the social order” (Moran 61). Indeed, the primary motivation for the white suitor’s punishment is his jeopardization of white supremacy.

⁴ As I discuss at more length in chapter two, marriage also granted white men more privilege and authority than bachelorhood. I do not consider bachelorhood in this project, but historians have typically argued that Americans viewed bachelors suspiciously. Anne Lombard claims, “In the eyes of the majority of adults, bachelors were never really men,” and Mark Kann adds that the founding fathers considered the bachelor “a man-child who did not merit the rights of men, fraternal respect, or civil standing” (Lombard 97, Kann 52). John McCurdy has recently challenged these conceptions of the bachelor as a man with less than equal democratic rights by studying how perceptions of bachelorhood shifted as notions of masculinity changed.

“stigmatiz[ed] interracial relationships as illicit sex rather than marriage” and “separated interracial intimacy from the notions of contract, choice, and civil rights otherwise associated with marriage and citizenship” (4). Karen Woods Weierman does some of the work of separating marriage from sex in her study of the antebellum era when she claims, “the laws are overwhelmingly about marriage, the fictional plots are driven by marriage, and the scandals are ignited by marriage. This is not a matter of marriage being a more polite topic than sex. The controversy during this period was about giving legal recognition to interracial liaisons” (7). In part, I seek to restore concepts of contract and democratic rights to the study of interracial relationships in nineteenth-century literature. To that end, I use the term “marriage” to refer to literary relationships in which the partners explicitly consider themselves as husband and wife within the text. Marriage invokes both legal and social privileges as well as responsibilities that were historically denied to interracial couples and are also denied to the interracial couples in the literature I explore. In some texts, the couples do marry legally but face strong social repercussions. The couples are often not married either by a legal or social definition of the word in these works; they are only married before “Heaven” and before each other. However, I believe it is important to consider literary representations of interracial unions as more than “couplings,” as Ann duCille calls them.⁵ Labeling these relationships as marriages not only retains the authors’ language but also serves to emphasize the legitimacy of the relationships, at least from the protagonists’ perspectives.⁶ Marriage gives the sense that these couples should have access to

⁵ Ann duCille is one of few critics to address seriously the marriage plot in literature by African Americans. Though duCille does spend some time discussing interracial “couplings,” most notably in her section on versions of Brown’s *Clotel*, she does not consider these relationships as “marriages.” The interracial marriage plot is not the specific focus of her study. Rather, she focuses on how black writers appropriated the general marriage plot to express their newfound freedom and to redefine black womanhood.

⁶ Thomas Dixon, Jr.’s *The Clansman* is the exception here. Though Dixon often speaks of his interracial couple in terms that suggest marriage, he refuses to use the word marriage to describe their relationship. I argue that he does

the same legal and social benefits as intraracial couples. It also underscores a greater national and political threat as marriage ties individuals to the nation in a way that coupling does not. By underscoring the protagonists' attitudes toward the interracial unions they form, I hope to lead readers away from an illicit-sex reading of the relationships that obscures the way these texts think about marriage and its relation to race and nation.

Beginning with Lydia Maria Child's 1842 short story "The Quadroons" in chapter one, I trace the 1830s debates about amalgamation that inspired Child to write what has become known as the progenitor of the tragic mulatta in American fiction. White male privilege was intrinsic to, if unacknowledged as a factor in, these debates. As a result of this broader historical context, issues of white male privilege are embedded within Child's short story and, subsequently, all of the tragic mulatta fictions inspired by "The Quadroons." In this chapter, I also consider Jerome B. Holgate's recently rediscovered novel, *Sojourn in the City of Amalgamation*, and Edward Williams Clay's series of political cartoons, *Practical Amalgamation*, which both express common fears that white men would lose both the exclusivity of their democratic rights and their domestic sovereignty if Northern states began repealing their intermarriage prohibitions. Beneath these overt anxieties about what intermarriage might do to pervert "natural affections" between members of the same race lies the heart of Holgate and Clay's fears: the loss of privileges exclusive to white masculinity. In response to anti-abolitionist rhetoric that made natural affection the contractual basis for marriage, Child rewrote the intermarriage narrative, proving that miscegenation laws prevented white men from contracting marriage according to their affections if those affections should fall upon a legally black woman. Child transformed the

this purposefully to revoke any sense of legitimacy the relationship might have. Dixon wants readers to view the white suitor and his interracial relationship as deviant.

interracial marriage plot into a narrative through which she and future writers could expose the privileges of white masculinity hidden beneath arguments like Holgate's.

Through the white suitors in William Wells Brown's *Clotel* and Frank J. Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends*, I consider in chapter two how African American men interpreted white male privilege and identity as "alienable properties," a term I borrow from Cheryl Harris. Interracial marriages in *Clotel* and *The Garies and Their Friends* more explicitly depict marriage as a tri-party contract that involves a man and woman as well as the nation. When the white suitor violates this contract by marrying a non-white woman, other white men rise up to deprive him of his privilege. Brown and Webb's novels reveal this marriage contract as the underlying foundation of white male democratic rights. Scholars like Theodore Allen, Noel Ignatiev, and Matthew Frye Jacobson argue that definitions of whiteness were expanding during the mid-nineteenth century to include European immigrants, most prominently the Irish, but Joel Williamson points out that after 1850, intolerance for miscegenation rose (Williamson 3). Whites increasingly interpreted intimacy with African Americans as contamination (67). Reading Brown and Webb's 1850s novels, I suggest that, as the nation hurtled toward war, certain boundaries of whiteness, specifically those that touched on miscegenation, became more rigid even as boundaries remained porous for immigrant populations who earned white identities by supporting white supremacy. Deviant white men who undermined the power of whiteness by engaging in relationships with non-white women, however, faced punishments that became increasingly severe, culminating in an alienation of their property in whiteness. The difference between Brown's treatment of white masculinity in 1853 and Webb's in 1857 may be an indicator of how rapidly these boundaries were solidifying in the decade before the Civil War

and perhaps offers a clue as to why African American men would be interested the question of white male privilege.

Lydia Maria Child returns in chapter three, where I examine her post-Civil War novel, *Romance of the Republic*. Scholars have argued that Child relies upon assimilation of the near-white woman, made possible by interracial marriage, to achieve her racial utopia; because she depends upon a white male hero to resolve racial tensions, Child fails in her effort to reconstruct the nation, according to leading scholars. Instead, I focus on Child's innovative effort to rewrite white masculinity and the use of the privileges attendant upon such an identity. Child imagines Reconstruction as a process that begins with the conversion of white men into benevolent patriarchs willing to welcome African Americans into the national family. In a novel where white men choose to marry previously enslaved women, the marriage contract becomes a way of bringing non-whites into a legal and social relationship with the post-emancipation nation. Child portrays white men not as subject to the governance of this unspoken contract but as the governors of the marriage contract, capable of rewriting its power and purpose to extend equal rights and protections to newly freed African Americans. Child's solution to racial reunion fails to transcend dependence upon white patriarchal authority to achieve its goals, but it does imagine white men as responsible for bringing African Americans into a legal, citizen relationship with the nation. Though modern scholars consider her reliance on white men to achieve her happy ending a failure to think outside the patriarchal box, I suggest instead that, through Alfred King, Child offers her creative reimagining of the abilities of the marriage contract.

My focus on interracial marriage and its effect on white masculinity lead me to conclude with two novels that might otherwise seem out of place in a project that considers the works of abolitionist writers like Lydia Maria Child, William Wells Brown, and Frank J. Webb. In chapter

four, I consider the reemergence of interracial marriage narratives toward the end of the century in light of the failure of Reconstruction and white Americans' desire for an intersectional, rather than an interracial, postwar reunion. Unlike Child's utopic *Romance*, which envisions a racial reunion effected by Northern white men, other white authors used interracial marriage plots to depict racial equality as the downfall of the white nation and encourage the drive for sectional reunion. Margaret Holmes Bates's forgotten 1886 novel, *The Chamber over the Gate*, portrays a white suitor's ruin and personal identity crisis after he unwittingly weds the daughter of a former slave. Stephen Gatsimer's unfortunate marriage and the existence of his white-appearing daughter mar his prospects for remarriage, despite the death of his first wife, and a political career, despite his local popularity. Cut off from these privileges of white masculinity, Stephen seeks redemption, which he ultimately achieves when he unites with his daughter's Southern suitor to ensure that she will remain unwed. Bates achieves the intersectional reunion of white men through the exclusion of the mulatta. Though Bates expresses some sympathy for her mulatta characters, her insistence upon a reunion that requires their exclusion nevertheless makes possible Thomas Dixon, Jr.'s portrayal of the mulatta as a vicious figure who uses her power over the white suitor to destroy the nation. Dixon expands the white suitor's issues of ruin and identity crisis to the nation in *The Clansman* when the malevolent Senator, Austin Stoneman, exacts vengeance upon the South for the sake of his secret mulatta mistress. Stoneman's imposition of "negro rule" rains chaos upon the South, a chaos to which Klan violence and intersectional marriage ultimately bring order. Both novels use the intermarriage plot to promote sectional reunion and the reassertion of white supremacy in the postbellum period.

That Dixon's *Clansman* can be read as the literary progeny of Child's "Quadrooms" might strike scholars as odd or improbable unless we consider the intermarriage debates of the

1830s and the anti-abolitionist works they produced as the true progenitors of intermarriage fiction. Scholars have thought of the legacy of “The Quadroons” primarily in terms of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Cassy in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and the plethora of other mixed-race heroines to which Cassy gave rise, including William Wells Brown’s *Clotel*, Harriet Jacobs’s Linda Brent, and Frances Harper’s *Iola Leroy*.⁷ However, this dissertation in part maps out new influences upon Child’s story as well as a new trajectory for the influence of “The Quadroons,” one that she might never have expected. Dixon’s novel descends from a long line of intermarriage fiction that begins not with “The Quadroons” but with the intense arguments over amalgamation in the 1830s that established interracial marriage fiction as a genre in which authors could explore the limits to the democratic privileges of white men. This focus on the plight of the white suitor allows me to trace a new trajectory for so-called tragic mulatta fiction, seeing it as a sub-trend in the overarching genre of intermarriage plots. Across the span of this larger genre, authors shift the “tragedy” between white suitors and black women as it best served their purposes of promoting white supremacy or calling attention to the instabilities and inequities of white supremacy. A study of the white suitor reveals nineteenth-century Americans’ awareness of and attention to the instability of white male identity, but it also suggests that white America turned to the marriage contract to provide a foundation for that identity that in turn gave compliant white men access to privilege. Ironically, though Child, Brown, and Webb’s mission contrasted sharply with Bates and Dixon’s later agenda, both antebellum abolitionist authors and postbellum white writers unite in their belief that a man’s democratic rights stem from his fulfillment of the marriage contract.

⁷ Linda Brent is, of course, the pseudonym that Jacobs uses to publish her autobiography, but as scholars have noted, Jacobs’s depiction of herself as Linda is heavily influenced by Child and Stowe’s tragic mulattas.

Chapter 1

“We are All Intermingled, without Regard to Colour”: Amalgamation Debates, White Privilege, and the Rise of Interracial Marriage Plots in the 1830s and ’40s

This chapter focuses on the development of interracial marriage plots in American literature from a historical perspective, claiming that it was, in fact, the debates about the repeal of the Massachusetts miscegenation law in the 1830s that gave rise to what scholars now call the tragic mulatta genre.¹ Questions of white male privilege that undergirded discussions of the law became foundational to this genre of literature created by Lydia Maria Child in 1842. Child’s “The Quadroons” has long received scholarly attention as the progenitor of the long-lived tragic mulatta archetype, which would haunt American literature well into the twentieth century. In this chapter, I argue that much of the success of Child’s story actually has little to do with her representation of this heavily stereotyped character. The success of Child’s narrative stems from her ability to use the mulatta’s relationship to her white suitor to indict white male privilege made possible by interracial marriage laws and to question the “naturalness” of affection. Child wrote against anti-abolitionist rhetoric, like that of Jerome B. Holgate’s 1835 novel *Sojourn in the City of Amalgamation*, that implied miscegenation laws were meant to protect white women like herself. She retaliates against critics by revealing the ways in which such laws promote and protect white male privilege. Much of the enduring literary influence of her story lies in its ability to expose marriage laws as the foundation of white male privilege. With “The

¹ The term “miscegenation” would not be coined until Lincoln’s second bid for the presidency. To use it in reference to the 1830s is ahistorical. However, I follow the lead of other historians in retroactively applying the term to laws that regulated interracial marriage. In light of the argument I make about the dual meanings of amalgamation during this time, I use miscegenation for the purposes of clarity to refer to laws that strictly governed legal wedlock. As historians like Martha Hodes have pointed out, regulating interracial sex proved difficult and often undesirable for antebellum whites, who cared more about preventing nonwhite partners and children from inheriting white property than preventing sexual liaisons.

Quadroons,” Child established the interracial love story as a genre that could challenge, critique, or even support the topic of white male privilege in regard to both race and gender.

In the 1830s, white America had little interest in designing laws to regulate interracial sex. Nevertheless, heated debates developed over the question of amalgamation throughout the decade and into the 1840s. These debates arose in part because abolitionists and their opponents often understood and used the term “amalgamation” to refer to different kinds of interracial relationships. Historian Elise Lemire explains that, literally defined, “amalgamation” is a term “borrow[ed] from metallurgy [...] referring to sexual reproduction as a mixture of race blood,” but contemporary rhetoric just as frequently used “amalgamation” to mean intermarriage (Lemire 5). While abolitionists frequently used amalgamation to discuss interracial sex, primarily the sexual abuse of slave women and the resulting offspring, their opponents appropriated the term to talk about something they found much more disturbing: legal intermarriage between blacks and whites. Sexual liaisons, usually white male rape of black women, confirmed dominance and privilege, but the legalization of marriages across the color line threatened to allow nonwhites the right to inherit white property and to access democratic rights through the white spouse. During the 1830s and ’40s, “amalgamation” carried these dual connotations, and its meaning often depended on the political allegiance of the person using the term and the context in which it was used. As the decade progressed, the competing definitions of amalgamation came to a head, with abolitionists arguing that the repeal of intermarriage prohibitions would stop amalgamation (illicit sexual liaisons between blacks and whites) and their opponents countering that it could only increase amalgamation (intermarriage). Whereas abolitionists held that the repeal of these laws would extend symbolic equality to African Americans, anti-abolitionists reasoned that, in the absence of legal prohibitions, abolitionists

would urge “unnatural” marriages across the color line in an effort to achieve practical racial equality. With the introduction of rhetoric labeling marital preferences “natural” or “unnatural,” anti-abolitionists reclaimed a public debate about government regulation of marriage as a should-be-private conversation about personal choice.

The unacknowledged stake in this debate was the future of white male privilege. Anti-abolitionists of the late 1830s did not frame their arguments about intermarriage in terms of protecting white male privilege and property. Rather, they presented themselves as the defenders of white female virtue. Of the years following the Civil War, Nancy Cott has claimed, “White southerners’ post-emancipation hysteria about African American men’s threat to white women illustrated how far a man’s freedom to marry and become head of a household defined his manhood,” yet Holgate’s *Sojourn* suggests that antebellum Northern men equally based their manhood on marriage freedoms and domestic dominance (45). Loosely following the experiences of the white male protagonist, Oliver Bolokitten, as he wanders through the chaotic City of Amalgamation, Holgate’s novel overtly concerns itself with the natural race aversions that have been unnaturally denied in the name of reaching racial equality within the city. In their fervor for racial equality, abolitionists assign cross-racial marriage partners to inhabitants. At the heart of the novel lies the story of Julia Sternfast, whose father uses his paternal authority to force Julia to marry a black man. Though Holgate presents his story as the rescue of a white damsel in distress, fears about the diminished freedoms and privileges of white masculinity underlie his overt concerns for the fate of the white female protagonist. In the figure of Julia’s father, the white male freedom to choose a marriage partner comes under attack in the new City of Amalgamation and, with it, the very structure of white supremacy. Without intermarriage bans in place, Holgate suggests, black men would pursue white women as wives, thereby gaining a

domestic authority that would degrade not only white women but, more importantly, challenge white male dominance. Drawing on the language of natural choice, Holgate depicts the corruption of a city in which marriage has become a publicly regulated contract, devoid of “natural” affection, made in the name of ideology. The tactics he employs in the novel both deny that public regulation of marriage already exists and obscure the investment white men have in obstructing anything approaching racial equality.

In order for abolitionists to regain rhetorical ground, they had to reach the issue at the heart of amalgamation debates. Unfortunately, activists frequently allowed themselves to be cowed by accusations of their own deviant marital preferences. White women especially fell subject to attacks claiming that their “natural” affections had been perverted by their involvement with the abolitionist movement. The backlash against the 1839 Lynn petition, an exclusively female movement to revoke Massachusetts’s intermarriage law, captured the gendered nature of anti-abolitionist arguments. As cartoonist Edward Williams Clay proved, if opponents could not claim to “protect” white female activists, they could certainly lampoon and shame them both for de-sexing and de-whitening themselves. The ladies of Lynn found themselves the subjects of the first print in a series of cartoons Clay would produce in 1839 against the repeal of the intermarriage ban. Like Holgate, Clay’s series focuses on white women and black men, drawing attention away from the issues of white masculinity that lay at the true core of their fears. Beneath these alternate “protections” of and attacks on white femininity lay a very real fear: black men would replace white men as masters of the home and of the nation.

With abolitionists on the defensive, it seemed like anti-abolitionists would win the day, but with the publication of “The Quadroons” in 1842, Lydia Maria Child upended anti-abolitionist narratives by placing white male privilege at the heart of domestic discontent.

Having already caused a stir with her 1833 pamphlet, *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans*, Child was no stranger to public ridicule. After the publication of the *Appeal*, her open endorsement of the repeal of the intermarriage ban cost her dearly, a sure sign that she had struck a nerve with her audience. Child's combined sentiments on race, slavery, sex, and marriage outraged her reading public and resulted in the revocation of her free membership at the Boston Athenaeum. Even more devastating to the already-impooverished Child family, parents canceled their subscriptions to Child's successful children's magazine, *Juvenile Miscellany*, and sales of her other books plummeted (Karcher, *First Woman* 192). Many of the newspapers that had praised her early work rebuked her for entering the male realm of political discourse and criticized her writing as unwomanly (Meltzer and Holland 26). Nevertheless, Child realized that, in the interracial marriage law, she had unearthed a major source of racial inequality built into the social, legal, and historical fabric of the United States. Following the intensification of these debates at the end of the decade, Child turned to fiction as a better medium in which to critique the heretofore-invisible white male privilege that had made her and other abolitionist women the subjects of animosity. Instead of defending her own whiteness or femininity, Child went on the offensive by calling attention to white male privilege and the abuses thereof.

Making Miscegenation Laws: The Politics of Marriage

A brief review of the longer history of interracial marriage in the United States sheds light on the cultural background that led to amalgamation debates in the 1830s and the production of both *Sojourn* and "The Quadroons." Interracial sex became a reality once people of different races came into contact on American soil, as both the Spanish and French empires recognized. Robert Fanuzzi notes the attitude toward intermarriage in "Spanish America, where

the so-called 'Catholic monarchy' was so eager to establish its social and religious institutions that it formalized its conquistadores' sexual liaisons with native women and legalized marriage between Iberians and Americans within nine years of Columbus's landfall" (84). With its North American colonies, France likewise "took explicit steps to formalize miscegenation between the male *habitantes*, or colonists, of Canada and the women of sovereign Native nations," believing intermarriage would lead to the "Frenchification" of the new world and its existing peoples (84). Both Spain and France acknowledged that interracial sexual liaisons occurred and legitimized these relationships as marriages early in the colonization process. Giving these relationships the sanction of law also granted them the protection of law and ensured that any offspring produced by the union would be considered equal citizens within the Spanish and French colonies.

British colonies in North America took a different approach to these liaisons. Fanuzzi explains that early miscegenation laws grew out of colonial Americans' desire to be treated as full British citizens rather than as subordinate colonists. According to Fanuzzi, "If they were ever going to position themselves as social equals and claim the title of republican citizens, British Americans were indeed going to have to disown the one social custom that made them creoles in the eyes of their English counterparts, their sexual liaisons with their nonwhite slaves" (86). Miscegenation laws functioned to formally deny the legitimacy of interracial relationships, relegating them to the category of illicit encounters, but these laws did nothing to stop either loving or coerced, prolonged or temporary sexual unions between partners of different racial backgrounds. Instead, these laws merely imposed public definitions of marriage onto private domestic arrangements: a consensual, long-term domestic relationship between a white man and a white woman received the sanction of marriage, but a similar domestic arrangement between a

white partner and a nonwhite partner earned social opprobrium as illegitimate sex. Such laws attempted to bring all legitimate, privilege-granting relationships into line with this definition of marriage. For the mixed-race offspring of extralegal unions, “There simply was no economic, legal, or civil position [...] because there was none for miscegenation [... Mixed-race people] were condemned to a distinctive state of social death, for legally, the category of mulatto did not even exist” (86). Miscegenation laws ensured that nonwhites would be excluded from the democratic rights and legal protections available to legitimate British citizens.

Independence only magnified the initial purpose and effect of miscegenation laws. As thirteen colonies became an independent nation, miscegenation laws helped the young nation to conflate whiteness and U.S. citizenship, providing the foundation for white privilege. Theodore Allen’s book, *The Invention of the White Race*, further illustrates the racial situation as former British colonies became the United States. Early, elite European colonizers created an artificial color line as a means of establishing and ensuring their social control. With the rapid increase of a poor, European-American class in the years after initial colonization, white elites found it necessary to protect themselves both from the unrest of exploited whites and enslaved blacks. To do so, they created a European-American “buffer” group. They neutralized the potential threat of a dissatisfied white servant class by offering them the status and privileges of a created “whiteness” (Allen 14). The stranglehold of white supremacy intensified as the new nation sought to establish social and political equilibrium. Understanding interracial marriage prohibitions as a form of social control that reinforced this “artificial color line” connects Allen’s analysis of racial oppression and social control with miscegenation laws. Whites who chose romantic partners from across the color line blurred the artificial distinction between races, a transgression that threatened the very foundation of white supremacy. In order for white

supremacy to succeed as a hierarchical power structure, white Americans had to be convinced that it was in their best interest to maintain the boundaries of the color line; they had to consent to external, legal definitions of what their private domestic arrangements should look like. Consequently, the sociopolitical system rewarded those whites who married endogamously with the confirmation and protection of their democratic rights but increasingly punished those who engaged in long-term relationships across the color line.²

Of course, relationships across the color line continued to take place, despite legal and social opposition. While some of these relationships took the form of long-term, marriage-like arrangements, interracial relationships often took the form of sexual abuse. When abolitionists began to talk about amalgamation in the 1830s, they were referring to these illicit sexual encounters and the mixed-race children such unions produced. As Child herself noted in her 1833 *Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans*, the relatively unquestioned authority of white men in the South resulted in the regular rape of enslaved women: “I have more than once heard people, who had just returned from the South, speak of seeing a number of mulattoes in attendance where they visited, whose resemblance to the head of the family was too striking not to be immediately observed” (24).³ Law, however, did not regulate sexual encounters, nor did it intend to do so. Whereas marriage blurred the color line by disseminating privileges reserved for whites, white-on-black rape reinforced racial distinctions. Though it literally contributed to the blurring of the color line in the mixed-race offspring it produced, rape

² I will return to this idea of policing and punishment of marriages across the color line in the next chapter.

³ Bertram Wyatt-Brown notes that centralized, patriarchal authority remained important to the structure of Southern homes even after the power of fathers and husbands had begun to decline in the North. This intensely patriarchal structure allowed white men almost complete control, but “the concentration of wide power in the hands of a single head of household entailed strains, particularly when the individual was ill equipped to handle the duties involved. Even if a wife or helpful relative were able to compensate for some of the Southern patriarch’s frailties, their roles had to be played out within the context of the legitimacy of his rule” (Brown 117). A system that left the white patriarch’s power unchecked meant that not even the legitimate white wife could limit her husband’s access to slave women.

reinforced the rights of white men while also reminding enslaved African Americans of their lack of even the most basic human rights, like the right to protect one's family.⁴ Child's 1843 story "Slavery's Pleasant Homes" darkly depicts this reality when Frederic Dalcho rapes his wife's slave, Rosa, and proceeds to whip her to death as her slave "husband," George, watches, powerless to intervene or to exercise legal rights as Rosa's husband. Dalcho's position as master gives him total control over Rosa, whose slave marriage carries no legal weight. "In the slave states," Jeffery Clymer writes, "the refusal to accord legal sanction to marriages between slaves [...] made the institution predominantly white. A slave [...] was always an individual piece of property, never a constituent part of a legal marriage or family" (10). The ability to marry became almost a quasi-legal marker of whiteness and the right to legally protect one's family a privilege nearly exclusive to white masculinity.⁵

Erasing the Politics of Marriage with the Law of "Natural" Affection

Miscegenation laws had been designed to promote and protect white privilege, a task at which they had been highly effective, but the abolitionists' efforts to have the Massachusetts law repealed in the early 1830s threatened the hierarchy that had given whites a comforting sense of security and stability during the young nation's development. Trouble started with the release of the second issue of the *Liberator* on January 8, 1831, in which William Lloyd Garrison called attention to the discriminatory practice of forbidding blacks and whites to marry and criticized

⁴ Historically, sexual amalgamation whitened the mixed-race population to such an extent that passing for white and, consequently, marital amalgamation became possible, leading to the next wave of white hysteria: that a white person might accidentally marry a spouse with African ancestry. The two definitions of amalgamation become intertwined in postbellum plots. I will return to this idea in chapter four.

⁵ I recognize that legal, free black marriages did occur in the antebellum United States, but they are rarely depicted in literature of the period. Frank J. Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends* provides one notable exception. However, black spouses often did not have access to the same legal rights that enabled white spouses to protect and provide for their families. Though I discuss *Garies* in the next chapter, I do not discuss it in terms of its representation of African American marriages or in terms of the lack of family and property rights available to African American spouses in the antebellum North. A future project might take into account the prevalence and significance of free black marriages both in antebellum history and literature.

Massachusetts' standing intermarriage law. Garrison claimed that the law, instated in 1705, infringed upon the democratic rights of African Americans by implying their inferiority and refusing them even the symbolic equality that would flow from a legalization of intermarriage (Lemire 56). Lemire notes that Garrison was the first to level public attack upon Massachusetts' miscegenation law, but he ignited a fire that would only intensify as the decade progressed (56). This metaphorical fire became a literal fire when opponents began attacking abolitionist meetings, culminating in arson as they set fire to Pennsylvania Hall in 1838. Though Massachusetts served as the hotbed for initial efforts to lift the miscegenation ban, the debate quickly spread to neighboring states, as did the fear of intermarriage. Nancy Cott states that the "most destructive mob actions against northern antislavery advocates, such as those in New York in 1834 and in Philadelphia in 1838, were set off by [...] charges that reformers were seeking to promote 'amalgamation' between the races" (44). Abolitionists had meant only to promote the equality of blacks and whites before the law, but their opponents quickly shifted the debate to questions of literal interracial marriage. Beneath these overt anxieties about intermarriage lay opponents' true fears: the loss of freedoms and privileges then attendant only upon white masculinity.

With abolitionists pushing for the repeal of laws that promoted racial inequality, opponents had to find a way to justify the existence of miscegenation laws that downplayed the important role these laws played in making male white privilege possible. Jerome B. Holgate's *Sojourn in the City of Amalgamation* epitomizes the rhetorical tactics adopted by the opponents of abolitionism as they sought to uphold miscegenation laws. The twenty-two-year-old Holgate had been swept up in debates about slavery, abolitionism, and the national race problem. In the early 1830s, Holgate attended meetings in his hometown of Utica, New York, that propounded a

system of gradual colonization (Lemire 68). From these meetings, Holgate learned and became convinced that blacks and whites were fundamentally unequal and therefore could not coexist. He further learned to fear the abolitionist movement because it preached racial equality, which Holgate and other anti-abolitionists interpreted as the end of “natural” prejudices that made white supremacy possible. Young Holgate participated in the Utica Literary Club debates of 1833, arguing in support of colonization and refuting abolitionist cries for immediate emancipation by claiming such a rash action would lead to intermarriage (68). Inspired by these debates and by the July 1834 riots against abolitionists that took place in New York City while he was visiting, Holgate self-published *Sojourn*, which he primarily circulated within the Utica Literary Club, under the name of the novel’s protagonist, Oliver Bolokitten (82).⁶ In this novel, Holgate expresses his fear that abolitionists will turn marriage into a political tool to eradicate inequality by forcing intermarriage. He obscures the ability of endogamous marriage to maintain public hierarchies of race by portraying it purely as a private choice that must be based on “natural” affection.

Holgate’s novel hinges upon a loosely connected series of vignettes as the narrator/presumed-author, Oliver Bolokitten, travels through the futuristic, dystopian City of Amalgamation in which inhabitants “are all intermingled, without regard to colour or character” as a consequence of government intervention into private marriage contracts (19). The salient plot line focuses on the courtship plight of young Julia Sternfast, whom he happens upon in his

⁶ The novel has never been reprinted and, until recently, survived only on microfilm, though it has recently been digitized. These factors lead me to presume that it was probably not widely read during its time. I have not been able to find other novels in this vein, but newspapers were filled with ads purportedly written by abolitionists seeking African American spouses and other satirical pieces that resonate with the sentiments expressed in *Sojourn*. Political cartoons like those of Edward Williams Clay also convey the sense of public outrage and fear over prospects of amalgamation. I choose to examine Holgate’s novel because it captures the public reaction to abolitionism and the thought of amalgamation more comprehensively than these smaller artistic productions. *Sojourn* summarizes in one novel the cultural moment to which abolitionists like Child were responding. See Appendix for Clay’s work.

wanderings and declares to be “the most lovely of her sex” and, he might add, race (Holgate 183). Holgate means for Julia to epitomize white womanhood, a fact he asks readers to “remember [...] that your sympathy may be awakened at the tragical destiny that awaits her” (183). In the City of Amalgamation, Julia’s tragic fate is to marry an African American. Her future lies in the hands of her father, Mr. Sternfast. Whipped into an enthusiastic frenzy by Wildfire, the resident governmental figure and the caricatured abolitionist, Sternfast insists upon Julia’s marrying a black man for the sake of promoting racial equality. To atone for his own youthful sin in marrying white, Sternfast declares, “she shall repair, as much as possible, the grievous transgression which I have committed. She shall marry a negro [...] or go unwedded to the heartless tomb” (56). Sternfast literally would rather see his daughter dead than married to her white suitor. His objections to Julia marrying a white partner echo the common question asked of progressive white men: would they approve of their daughters marrying black men? White Americans assumed the response to fall in line with Sternfast’s vision of a “heartless tomb.” That Sternfast’s sentiments invert this saying underscores his failure as the father and protector of white womanhood for white readers.

The most coherent and continuous of all the plot lines in *Sojourn*, Julia’s plight pits natural affection against political idealism and government control. Julia clings to her preference for white men and disgust for black men. She resists her father’s injunctions, arguing that “you compel me to a marriage which will kill me” as a result of her strong “repugnance to the connexion [sic]” with a black man (139). Holgate contrasts Julia’s “repugnance” with the relentless control of her father and of the state he represents. Because his demand is driven by his adherence to Wildfire’s radical preachings on racial equality, Sternfast’s patriarchal authority becomes the vehicle by which the state, represented by Wildfire, polices marriage. Instead of

defending his daughter's right to choose a husband based on affection, Sternfast submits to and enforces government policy. By allowing external regulations to enter into his daughter's private contracting of marriage, Sternfast proves himself to be a failed protector and an inadequate citizen in a democratic nation. While his concern seems to be with preserving the laws of natural affection and protecting the virtue of white femininity, Holgate betrays deeper fears about what he sees as the ebbing of the rights and privileges of white men in a democracy.

Beyond condemning her father as an ineffective protector of white womanhood, Julia's "tragedy" calls into question her father's brand of white masculinity in a city that controls the intimate contracting of marriage, revealing his lost ability to contract marriage in accord with his own affections. Responding to Julia's protestations of indifference, even disgust, toward her intended groom Cosho, Sternfast reminds her, "when my former [white] wife expired, thereby leaving me free in this important matter, I instantly espoused a negress, thereby lending my feeble influence to the popular cause. Nor can I aver I love my present partner as my former, indeed, daughter, *I do not love her at all*" (Holgate 139). Sternfast's enthusiasm for "the popular cause" distorts his affections to the point where he willingly marries a woman he does not love simply to effect social and political change. This type of union, against one's own "natural" preferences, reduces marriage to a political action in the text. Moreover, his willingness to deny personal sentiments in order to comply with the ideological demands of the city's political leader suggests Sternfast to be a slave to his own ideology and to Wildfire, the leader of the amalgamation movement. Though Sternfast describes himself as "free" to choose a second wife, the text suggests him to be anything but free. Shackled by ideology, Sternfast allows government leaders and popular trend to dictate his marriage partner rather than "love," which, according to Bolokitten, should be the "sole arbiter of marriage" (146).

The language of Julia's objection to such marriages arranged against the consent of sentiment reveals the true extent of her father's enslavement. *Sojourn* draws heavily upon a developing nineteenth-century discourse of marriage as a matter of private choice driven by natural affection. Cott notes that, in the United States, "Consent was basic to both marriage and government," with Lemire adding that, by the 1830s, "Americans generally considered marriage a private affair governed by conjugal affection and therefore believed that state intervention should be minimal [...] [T]he state honored individualism and privacy, viewing marriage as a voluntary and contractual act between two people" (3, 56). Together, Cott and Lemire portray nineteenth-century marriage as a contract dependent on the parties' abilities to give consent. Julia's response to her father invokes the ideas of choice, affection, consent, and contract as points of objection to her father's demand. "[C]an this be just," she argues, "must a natural affection for one person be smothered, and marriage contracted with another whom we despise?" (139). The choice of wording here casts marriage in the light of a voluntary contract, invoking both the nineteenth-century ideology of natural affection that should drive the contracting of marriage as well as the philosophy behind contract making. That Julia uses a passive voice construction rather than active verbs suggests that some external power smothers "a natural affection" and contracts marriage on behalf of the unnamed "we," likely the citizens of the city, which includes her father. Julia's response reveals that her own agency, as well as that of her father and the city's other residents, has been removed by the zeal to enforce intermarriage.

Inhabitants of the City of Amalgamation have lost their ability to contract marriage according to their own desires and instead submit to having these contractual arrangements dictated to them by prevailing ideology. As Carole Pateman explains, only individuals who own

property in themselves can make contracts.⁷ Since early contract theorists considered women property rather than individuals owning a property in themselves, Julia's inability to contract marriage apart from her father's choosing is less shocking than Sternfast's reliance upon government mandates to determine his right to contract marriage with a white woman.⁸ This government intervention into private contracts feminizes Sternfast and the city's other white men in the eyes of nineteenth-century readers. If individuals in the City of Amalgamation are not free to choose their marriage partners based on natural preference, Holgate implies that they are not truly able to contract marriage. Instead, marriage is "contracted" for them by the governmental parties responsible for dictating interracial matches, robbing white men of the privileges that separate them from women and African Americans. The compliant white male citizens in the city are slaves to the government and public opinion. Through Julia's story, Holgate argues against any sort of state-inspired policing of private marriage choice that might infringe upon white (male) rights.

Sternfast is not the only man whom Holgate depicts as enslaved by ideology and government regulation. Aside from Julia's story, most of the subplots revolve around white men who have submitted to unwanted marriages with black women. Upon entering the city, Bolokitten first meets two couples on their way to participate in the "amalgamating process," a series of medical procedures that will remove the white men's "natural" prejudices so they can

⁷ Because it reduced people to property, slavery stripped many African Americans of their rights to give consent. Only those who owned property in themselves could consent to participate in legal contracts. Slaves, by nineteenth-century contract logic, were incapable of entering binding contracts apart from their masters' wills because they had no property in themselves. Pateman explains that, believing women incapable of rational thought and considering them the possessions of their husbands or fathers, early contract theorists also excluded women from the category of individuals with property in themselves. Women therefore relied on male relatives who entered contracts in their names.

⁸ Nineteenth-century ideology of sentiment increasingly allowed women greater freedom in choosing marriage partners apart from patriarchal oversight. Property laws were also changing as the women's movement began to pick up in the late 1830s. However, coverture laws still limited women's rights to own property apart from their husbands.

marry their black brides (14). When Bolokitten asks whether his new friend, Hoffle, is a “proselyte to the creed” of amalgamation, he responds unenthusiastically with “Not exactly [...] but it has come to be so fashionable among us, that one can hardly keep from it” (14). Hoffle bows to “fashionable” trends despite his own revulsion to his chosen partner, and Bolokitten accompanies them to a church-like building in which the medical procedures take place. Wildfire leads them through the amalgamating process, part of which is overseen by a “grim giant, striding to and fro, flourishing his cat-o’-nine-tails,” whom Wildfire names “the Goddess, Enthusiasm” (24). Attended by devoted “votaries,” Enthusiasm “commenced flogging the votary with his knotted scourge” to produce the spirit of enthusiasm, in which the novitiate is boiled to help melt away prejudice in the spirit of zeal (25).⁹ In a culture familiar with tales of overseers and whippings, the votaries’ “scourg[ing]” with a “cat-o’-nine-tails” could not fail to invoke scenes of African American enslavement in the South. This encounter with the reluctant husband and the “grim giant” Enthusiasm, who beats away reluctance, suggests that white men in the city are slaves, both to Wildfire and to their own misguided enthusiasm. Much like runaway slaves, these white men also try to escape their black partners when possible. Speaking of his recently married friend, Hoffle states, “Dashey has given his black spouse the slip” (144).¹⁰ “I don’t blame him,” he adds, “he did not marry her because he loved her, that was out of the question, but because an amalgamationist wished it” (144). More insidious for Holgate’s readers than the tragedy of a beautiful white woman having to marry a boorish black man is the enslavement of white men to either a cause or a government.

⁹ Despite referring to Enthusiasm as a “Goddess,” Holgate nevertheless uses masculine pronouns to describe the giant. This might indicate that gender has also been blurred in this city without a color line.

¹⁰ Holgate seems to give his characters literal names. Wildfire fans the flames of amalgamation. Sternfast sternly holds fast to his insistence upon Julia intermarrying. Dashey makes a dash for freedom. Given that Hoffle sounds like coffee, it might be only a slight stretch to conclude that Holgate chose the name to conjure the image of white men chained to black spouses.

Holgate imagines a world in which the state directly intervenes in private marriage choice, overriding natural affections and revoking citizens' rights to give consent in one of the most fundamental contracts. Without the ability to give consent to their own marriage choices, the inhabitants of the City of Amalgamation become slaves to the government and their own political agenda, which has invested the government with power to dictate marriage laws. Ostensibly, Holgate means for Julia's plot to be the most compelling narrative in his hodgepodge of tales, yet beneath the unfolding of Julia's "tragical destiny" and the arguments about natural affection lies what for white readers would have been an even more disturbing message: the loss of white male freedom to make and enter contracts according to personal choice. Though Julia's plot line may work to invoke reader "sympathy" and outrage, side narratives about white men who sacrifice not only their right to determine which contracts they will enter but their democratic rights to resist unjust government serve to provoke fear in Holgate's white male readers.¹¹ Without the ability to make contracts and participate in government, instead of merely obeying its mandates as Sternfast, Hoffle, and Dashey do, white men are reduced to the position of slaves. The novel functions, then, on two levels. Most obviously, Holgate makes intermarriage debates an issue of protecting white women and natural choice, but on a deeper level, the novel concerns itself with white male privileges to make contracts and to participate in government.

Though he means to provoke his white male readers into action, Holgate also gives them reason to hope that abolitionist efforts will not succeed. In the absence of miscegenation laws, Holgate argues that the law of "natural" affection, which repels members of different races but attracts members of the same race, will always stand and will emerge to reclaim the privacy of

¹¹ As noted above, Holgate self-published his novel and circulated it among his friends. He clearly meant to appeal to a white male audience of the Utica Literary Club.

marital choice even if laws should arise to restrain it. For instance, despite the effects of the amalgamating process, white men still feel a “natural” repulsion to their black brides. Dashey runs off shortly after his wedding. Other men continue in their mixed marriages but exhibit physical reactions to their “unnatural” arrangements. At a public forum, Bolokitten witnesses “a dreadful vomiting” occasioned by a white man’s inability to control his physical disgust caused by the smell of his African American wife (20). “Cologne bottles flourished about his nose, but without effect,” and the man had to be “hurried out of the church, the vomit flying on all around” (20). This “shameless wight,” Bolokitten informs readers, “had lately wedded a negress; his stomach, too wise to be bamboozled into such mongrel principles, sought every possible occasion to vent its vile humor” (21). Neither the innovations of the amalgamating process nor the assistance of cologne can “bamboozle” the “wisdom” of this man’s body. Manmade means fail to overcome his inborn, physical prejudices. The novel suggests that miscegenation laws exist as a fact of nature, not simply as manmade laws designed to uphold white privilege.

In light of growing abolitionist efforts to repeal miscegenation laws, a text like *Sojourn* contradicts itself. As an extended allegory opposing the idea of legalized intermarriage, the novel clearly endorses the existence of state miscegenation laws that merely give legal weight to the “natural” antipathy that exists between members of differing racial backgrounds. At the same time, Holgate resists the right of external authority, be it father, political ideology, or even law itself, to determine the propriety of a marriage partner for an individual. These conclusions, while inherently contradictory, allow Holgate and other anti-abolitionists to uphold the “naturalness” of miscegenation laws while claiming that law has no business regulating private marriage contracts. Relying on the language of natural affection, Holgate can simultaneously insist that marriage should be a private matter determined by the contracting individuals and

uphold the existence of laws that restrict that choice. Declaring marriage an entirely private matter also enables Holgate, and others of like mind, to declare something like miscegenation law debates as unfit for political discourse because it infringed upon a subject too private for public consideration. Such a move stifled discussion and hid the logical inconsistencies of anti-abolitionist rhetoric that claimed marriage to be a matter of private choice, yet resisted measures meant to ensure that it remained so.

Despite the insistence upon love-based marriages found in *Sojourn* and other nineteenth-century texts, most of these texts joined with “[p]olitical and legal authorities [that] endorsed and aimed to perpetuate nationally a *particular* marriage model: lifelong, faithful monogamy, formed by the mutual consent of a man and a woman,” according to Cott (3). Cott might revise her definition of state-endorsed marriage to read “the mutual consent of a [white] man and a [white] woman,” for, while the opponents of interracial marriage had a deep investment in promoting the individual’s right to choose a marriage partner, they had an equal level of interest in policing that choice when it crossed the color line. Anti-amalgamationist works of the decade reproduced this language of individual choice, yet the entire debate surrounding intermarriage prohibitions nullified the assertion that “conjugal affection” was a private affair; the miscegenation laws anti-amalgamationists strove to maintain reinforced the right of the state to intervene in this “voluntary and contractual act between two people.” Pretending that marriage was completely a matter of individual choice actively denied the fact that, as Cott says, the “public sees itself and its own interests reflected in the couple’s action,” thereby making all marriages both public and political statements, whether those statements are in favor of the status quo or opposed to it (2). More insidiously, announcing that marriage was a private matter, and therefore meant for private discussion rather than public, rendered invisible both the white supremacist and the patriarchal

structures that defined what a proper marriage partner looked like economically, anatomically, and racially. Rhetorically claiming marriage as a matter of private choice worked to silence objections to the regulation of that choice and to reinforce the structures that imposed these regulations.

Questioning Natural Affection, Questioning Whiteness

Keen as they were to expose interracial sexual abuse and establish racial equality by repealing miscegenation laws, abolitionists shied away from being labeled “amalgamators.” As their opponents quickly learned, accusing the abolitionists of wanting to intermarry often proved an effective method for silencing their protestations against miscegenation laws as well as their underlying push for racial equality. This strategy had succeeded early in the decade when, as Weierman explains, John P. Bigelow, a Massachusetts state representative, presented before the 1831-1832 legislative session an amendment that would nullify the state miscegenation laws (148). Attacks overwhelmingly focused on Bigelow’s personal motivations for introducing such an amendment, claiming, “We should not be surprised if Mr. Bigelow has been paying his devotions to some ‘elegant creole,’ and has adopted this method of exonerating himself from a portion of the obloquy in conscience” (qtd. in Weierman 148). Following a slew of personal attacks of this nature, Bigelow withdrew the proposed amendment. Clearly the anti-abolitionists had struck a chord, for the crusade against the Massachusetts miscegenation law would not reemerge in force until 1838 (148). Abolitionists had pinpointed marriage equality as a potential source of greater social and political equality, yet they carefully insisted that they did not actively promote intermarriage. A conflict quickly arose between abolitionists’ ideological desire for racial equality, epitomized in the 1830s by their efforts to defeat miscegenation laws, and their practical resistance to realized intermarriage, fueled by their belief in scientific racism and

investment in the structures of white supremacy.¹² Abolitionists wanted racial equality, in theory, but not at the cost of their reputation or privileges as legitimate whites endogamously married.

When the abolitionists next began in earnest to repeal the Massachusetts miscegenation law, opponents once again latched onto the discourse of amalgamation to insult abolitionists and to hinder their progress. As the controversy surrounding the Lynn Petition of 1839 reveals, these anti-abolitionist tactics once again succeeded in cowing abolitionists. Aroline Augusta Chase, the petition's author, certainly had not intended to provoke large-scale debate over intermarriage when she submitted her relatively innocuous petition in favor of racial equality to the Massachusetts state legislature on New Year's Day in 1839.¹³ Chase's petition addresses no specific aspect of racial discrimination and simply reads, "To the Legislature of the State of Massachusetts, the undersigned ladies of Lynn, in the county of Essex, respectfully pray you immediately repeal all laws in this State, which make any distinction among its inhabitants, on account of color" (qtd. in Kull 22). This brief petition, however, created a maelstrom of criticisms directed personally at Chase as well as generally at the "Ladies of Lynn" who had signed the petition. Much of this outrage emerged from either ignorant or willful misunderstanding of the content of the petition. Within a short time after the submission of the petition, Northern newspapers began circulating reports that, as the Hampshire Republican

¹² Harriet Wilson's 1859 autobiographical novel, *Our Nig; Or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black*, demonstrates the hardships faced by free African Americans living in the racially prejudiced North. Though the novel's protagonist, Frado, never experiences Southern slavery, the narrative reveals that Frado's life in the "free" North has been equally difficult and painful. As the child servant of a white family, Frado experiences physical abuse and neglect. Frado's life as an adult improves only slightly as she experiences racial prejudices that exclude her from receiving needed assistance in her impoverished state. The novel exposes Northern prejudice and indicts abolitionist sympathizers who promote racial equality in theory but reject it in practice.

¹³ Contemporary criticisms of the petition as well as Chase personally immediately appeared. Most references name her as Caroline Chase. Historian Andrew Kull likewise refers to her as Caroline. Based on my reading of letters to contemporary abolitionist Abby Kelley Foster, in which writers mention having gotten a letter from Aroline Chase, "Caroline" seems to be a mistake on the part of her contemporaries. I therefore refer to her as Aroline, though I preserve the references to Caroline in the quotes.

phrased it, the women of Lynn “petitioned the Legislature for the PRIVILEGE of marrying BLACK husbands” (qtd. in *Liberator*, Feb. 8, 1839). The petition itself made no reference to any desire on the part of the signers, many of whom were already married, to wed black men. Why did this relatively small political act on the part of the women of Lynn result in a nineteenth-century media frenzy over the prospect of amalgamation?

Historian Andrew Kull sheds light on the controversy created by Chase’s petition, explaining that the “best known of the Massachusetts laws that in 1839 made any distinction between the races were the statutes prohibiting and invalidating marriages between a white person and ‘a negro, indian [sic] or mulatto’” (22). Even if the miscegenation law had not been the most prominent discriminatory law on record in Massachusetts at the time, pleas for the termination of “any distinction among [...] inhabitants, on account of color,” had already become linked to intermarriage by 1839. As *Sojourn* depicts, any call for racial equality instantly became equated with the promotion of interracial marriage in the minds of detractors. In a deliberate attack on these women’s femininity as well as their white identities, media sources openly impugned the petitioners’ sexual propriety by portraying them as aroused by African American men. For instance, Edward Williams Clay, a prolific political cartoonist then working in New York City, made these attacks explicit in his print “Johnny Q Introducing the Haytien Ambassador to the Ladies of Lynn, Mass.”¹⁴ The lithograph depicts a circle of white women crowding around John Quincy Adams, who gestures his hand toward the ladies by way of introducing “General Marmalade,” a caricatured African American whose exaggerated lips, sloping forehead, and projected posterior combined with his overly embellished, out-of-style

¹⁴ See figure 1. I am indebted to the American Antiquarian Society for their generosity in allowing me to view Clay’s series of prints as well as for their information about the circulation of these prints. Clay’s prints would likely have been targeted toward a male audience and would have been found in bars and sold in bookstores.

clothing mark him as ridiculous. Despite his stereotyped portrayal, the ambassador draws the attention of all ladies present and the admiration of the African American men who stand behind the circle of white women. The ladies exclaim things like, “How I should like to kiss his balmy lips!” and “What a delightful perfume he has brought into the room with him.” Such comments signal the unnatural affections of the Lynn women that have been distorted, as Clay would have us believe, by their political engagement with the abolitionist movement.¹⁵

Much like *Sojourn*, “Johnny Q” leaves viewers questioning whether abolitionists pursue intermarriage rights because they have unnatural affections or because their affections have been twisted by their obsession with ending prejudice. While opponents maintained that marriage should be a matter of private choice, they also realized the effectiveness of openly attacking abolitionists’ private marriage choices when abolitionists did try to open public debate about miscegenation laws. In a culture that valued marriage as a private institution and that based its claims to white privilege on marital choice, neither side desired to have its private decisions publicly impugned. As the next chapter addresses in greater depth, marriage partners could either confirm or deny an individual’s whiteness; accusations of wanting to marry, or of already being married to, an African American implicitly called into question an individual’s white identity. Within a few months, the amalgamation accusations became so heated and damaging to these women’s reputations that many of the women revoked their signatures from the petition. Though ridicule of the petition continued to circulate throughout the North for many months, sparking

¹⁵ The Lynn petition inspired Clay to create a series of satirical prints entitled *Practical Amalgamation*. “Johnny Q Introducing the Haytien Ambassador to the Ladies of Lynn, Mass.” inaugurates the series, which, much like *Sojourn*, imagines the outcome of racial equality. This series of seven prints depicts what for Clay is the logical progression of racial equality. In “Johnny Q,” white women mingle with black men in a political context. “A Musical Soirée” moves them into a social setting, followed by an intimate scene of black and white courtship in “Practical Amalgamation” that leads to “The Wedding” of a white woman and black man. “The Fruits” depicts the final outcome of this progression: a black man lies at full length upon a couch, his feet propped upon the lap of his white wife, who nurses their mixed-race child. Clay’s series, published in New York City, reveals the scope of the Lynn controversy and the discourse of amalgamation that proliferated in its aftermath.

further debates over intermarriage, the ladies of Lynn receded from the frontline and abandoned their crusade for racial equality.

Despite what their opponents might have claimed, abolitionists' efforts to repeal miscegenation laws did not mean that they widely endorsed the practice of intermarriage. For instance, while William Lloyd Garrison's own editorials in the *Liberator* supported the abolition of anti-miscegenation laws, he also openly opposed amalgamation. Defending the movement against such accusations, Garrison proclaimed, "in common with all true abolitionists, we bear testimony in all times and in all places against amalgamation [...] [A]bolitionists are the last persons in all the world to entertain *practical* amalgamation. It is *exclusively* found among their enemies" (*Liberator*, May 18, 1838). Garrison contrasts the marital amalgamation he has been accused of supporting with the sexual, or practical, amalgamation occurring every day. He seems to imply that abolitionists are so far from promoting any sort of amalgamation that they are unwilling to turn a blind eye to the illicit sexual encounters between whites and blacks. In arguing to repeal the miscegenation law, abolitionists meant only to extend symbolic equality to African Americans by lifting a legally enforced boundary; they never meant for that boundary to completely disappear through actual intermarriages. Lemire clarifies the abolitionist position: "In truth, despite their willingness to fight for the abolishment of slavery and the end of race prejudice, most of the abolitionists were not in favor of inter-marriage and certainly none of them is on record for ever inter-marrying in the antebellum period themselves" (82). Garrison's resistance to "practical amalgamation" rejects the immorality of illicit sexual encounters, but it also rejects intermarriage in anything more than theory. As much as he believed in the necessity of repealing miscegenation laws as a step toward ending prejudice and achieving equality,

Garrison also felt it his duty to “bear testimony [...] against amalgamation” in both senses of the word.

Abolitionists were more interested in the politically symbolic meaning of repealing miscegenation laws than they were in enabling interracial couples to marry. While they embraced equality in theory, they resisted it in practice. In fact, comments made by abolitionists often reveal that they equally subscribed to biological arguments about race. As one correspondent to the *Liberator* put it, “I would not recommend the white to marry blacks, or the black to marry whites; and still less should I recommend persons who are well-informed, polished and virtuous, to marry those who are rude, ignorant and degraded, whatever may be their complexion” (*Liberator*, Jan. 29, 1831). Though the writer couches these differences in terms of levels of intelligence and manners that may occur within or across complexions, he clearly implies that whites are “well-informed, polished and virtuous” while blacks are innately “rude, ignorant and degraded,” meaning the races should never intermarry. If left to their own choice, this abolitionist writer assumes that whites would choose white partners, much as Holgate suggests in *Sojourn*. In this regard, some abolitionists put more trust in the tenets of scientific racism than their opponents; repealing miscegenation laws did not trouble many abolitionists in part because they believed the laws of nature were sufficient to deter intermarriage, making man’s law superfluous and discriminatory. Indeed, Child says as much in her *Appeal*: “While the [race] prejudice exists, such [interracial] unions cannot take place” (133). Her argument logically concludes that miscegenation laws are unnecessary if preexisting social and biological prejudices already deter intermarriage. Anti-abolitionist attacks on abolitionists’ marital preferences worked largely because abolitionists were only committed to racial equality in theory. Though they fought tenaciously throughout the 1830s to have the Massachusetts

miscegenation law repealed, they fought just as persistently to refute accusations that they endorsed the practice of intermarriage, believing that the repeal of such laws would be enough to open the door for racial equality. However, abolitionist responses to their opponents' insults often revealed their own commitment to a system that prized whiteness over blackness and protected democratic rights as the province of white Americans.

Marriage as an Agent of Political Change

The idea of intermarriage captured anti-abolitionist attention in a way that stories of the sexual amalgamation happening every day in the South did not because endogamous marriage served as a primary pillar of white privilege. Discussions of amalgamation and the repeal of miscegenation laws continued to pervade public discourse when Lydia Maria Child published her short story, "The Quadroons," in the 1842 *Liberty Bell* gift book. The *Liberty Bell* offered Child an ideal medium through which to speak to a broad audience, as the annual gift book was "[w]idely read by European and American readers alike for nearly twenty years" (Levy 143). "Child," Valerie Levy explains, "saw in the gift-book an opportunity to bridge the gap between thought and action amongst abolitionists' potential supporters" (143). But the gift book also challenged Child's skills as a writer. Given the broad nature of the *Liberty Bell's* readership, the best pieces had to address abolitionist concerns as well as anti-abolitionist concerns in their efforts to win potential adherents. Abolitionists had grown accustomed to tales of sexually abusive master-slave relationships, but their opponents had deafened themselves to such arguments by shifting the conversation to intermarriage in the 1830s. Child needed a genre that could encompass consensual and coerced interracial relationships alike. To respond to opponents, she would have to prove that the current ban on intermarriage hurt white women more than it protected them and that white men, in reality, were the only people who stood to

lose anything through the legalization of interracial marriage. However, to continue her appeal to an abolitionist audience, she would also need to balance these objectives with concerns for the enslaved woman.

When she wrote “The Quadroons,” the accomplished author and pioneer of several new literary genres could hardly have imagined that she was making one of her most lasting contributions to American literature. After all, the tragic mulatta, as early twentieth-century scholar Sterling Brown would dub her, had been appearing in fiction since at least the eighteenth century.¹⁶ European abolitionists had already adopted the tragic mulatta figure as a means by which to attack the depravities of American slavery, and in 1834, Child herself published “Joanna,” an early American iteration of the tragic mulatta tale that drew largely from John Stedman’s 1796 work, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (Sollors, *Neither* 189-192).¹⁷ On the surface, Child’s short story seems to offer little variation on the plot these earlier texts had already developed, yet as Eve Allegra Raimon notes, “[N]o nineteenth-century writer was more instrumental in the [tragic mulatta] trope’s proliferation and circulation” (26). I argue that “The Quadroons” owes much of its enduring success to its ability to respond to the amalgamation debates discussed in this chapter. Though she did not invent the genre, Child popularized the tragic mulatta plot not only as a narrative

¹⁶ Werner Sollors traces the tragic mulatta plot as far back as Richard Steele’s essay “Inkle and Yarico,” published in the *Spectator* on March 13, 1711 (*Neither* 193). The story features an Indian maiden, Yarico, who is betrayed by her English lover, Inkle. In the pursuit of wealth, Inkle sells her and their unborn child at a slave market in Barbados (195). Much like the trajectory of Child’s own fiction, the tragic mulatta plot evolved from the tragic Indian plot.

¹⁷ See, for instance, Gustave de Beaumont’s *Marie, or Slavery in the United States*, published in 1835. Beaumont, a French abolitionist and travel companion to Alexis de Tocqueville, writes the story of a white-appearing woman and her French lover. Faced with American prejudices, Marie and her lover are eventually forced to seek asylum among the Cherokee people. Kimberley Snyder Manganelli notes also the presence of tragic mulattas in “the writing of British travel writers, such as Frances Trollope and Harriet Martineau, who toured the south in the early nineteenth century” and “were fascinated by accounts of *plaçage*” (503). A more expansive project might look at the transatlantic development of interracial marriage narratives; however, this project will focus on American texts. I have been unable to find an extant copy of Child’s “Joanna,” nor is the story referenced by any scholar but Sollors.

through which to consider the national role of the mixed-race female body, as other scholars have claimed, but also as a narrative through which to expose the privileges of white masculinity hidden beneath opponents' arguments about protecting white womanhood and natural attraction.

Government regulation of natural affection had been an important issue for Child since the early 1830s at least. In her 1833 *Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans*, she argued in support of the repeal of Massachusetts's miscegenation. Acknowledging the unpopularity of her position, she claimed, "I am perfectly aware of the gross ridicule to which I may subject myself by alluding to this particular," but she bravely continues:

an unjust law exists in this Commonwealth, by which marriages between persons of different color is pronounced illegal [...] In the first place, the government ought not to be invested with power to control the affections, any more than the consciences of citizens. A man has at least as good a right to choose his wife, as he has to choose his religion. His taste may not suit his neighbors; but so long as his deportment is correct, they have no right to interfere with his concerns. (196)

Child reasons, in line with nineteenth-century thinking about marriage, that the choice of a spouse should be determined by private "taste" rather than government regulation. Intermarriage laws, according to Child, do nothing if not "interfere with [individual marriage] concerns;" therefore, the logical conclusion of the debate would be a unanimous agreement to repeal the intermarriage ban and allow "conjugal affection" to take its course free of restraint, if opponents were truly only concerned with government attempts to regulate affection. This reasoning provides the underlying premise of her 1842 short story, "The Quadroons." "Quadroons" follows a now-archetypal plot structure: a white suitor falls in love with a beautiful, near-white woman of mixed heritage, treats her as his wife, and raises a family with her, only to one day abandon her and the children for the legitimacy of an endogamous marriage. The abandoned woman dies, and her children are sold into slavery.

Edward and Rosalie lead a happily secluded life together with their daughter, Xarifa, until Edward desires to exercise his democratic rights by running for public office. Rosalie and Xarifa become a liability to the young politician, who abandons them for a white wife, Charlotte, who provides him access to the legal and social benefits necessary to further his career. Despite these gains, Edward never ceases to love his first “wife,” the quadroon Rosalie, but love is not enough to convince him to remain in a “marriage sanctioned by Heaven” alone (118). Though his natural choice leads him to Rosalie, Edward stands to gain social and political advantages through his marriage to Charlotte, whom he uses and deceives for his own benefit. The marriage questions raised by the consensual, marriage-like relationship contained within Child’s story hit home for readers in 1842. “Quadroons” addressed an issue that still occupied a central position in the discussion of slavery, racial equality, and white privilege. Responding to contemporary writers and artists who portrayed amalgamation prohibitions as a means of protecting white women’s virtue, Child instead reveals how these prohibitions hurt white women, whose unfaithful husbands could not be held accountable for their infidelities with a legal nonperson, and black women, who received none of the legal rights and protections associated with marriage. Child proves that even, or perhaps especially, for white men, marriage was a political choice with social and legal ramifications, not necessarily a choice built on natural affection.

Through Rosalie and Edward’s relationship, Child explores questions of natural affection and the law and politics of marriage. Though “the daughter of a wealthy merchant of New Orleans” and a resident of the fashionable Sand Hills vacation community of Georgia, Rosalie nevertheless remains secluded in her lonely cottage, avoiding neighbors as “merely neighbors-in-law” because the “edicts of society had built up a wall of separation between her and them; for

she was a quadroon” (116).¹⁸ Unmindful of her race or the “wall of separation between” them, Edward, “a handsome and wealthy young” white man, early finds himself attracted to Rosalie (117). Writing directly against the notion that “a negress cannot engender love in the bosom of a white man, and therefore, [...] they ought not to intermarry,” as Holgate claims in *Sojourn*, Child describes the “bright intelligence of [Rosalie’s] mind” that “inspired [Edward] with a far deeper sentiment than belongs merely to excited passion. It was in fact Love in the best sense” (Holgate 146, “Quadroons” 117). What if, she implicitly asks, an African American woman *can* “engender love in the bosom of a white man”? Should they be allowed to marry? Instead of assuming, as her contemporaries on both sides of the debate did, that genuine affection could not exist between whites and blacks, Child takes as the central premise of her story that it can. If marriage is purely a nonpolitical matter of personal choice based on mutual affection, why should her couple not be allowed to marry? Rather than a coerced or plaçage relationship, Child insists upon readers understanding the relationship between her white suitor and tragic mulatta as a type of marriage. This focus on marriage sets Child’s story apart from those of earlier authors of tragic mulatta fiction, but it also shows her text to be as much in dialogue with anti-abolitionist productions concerned with intermarriage as with abolitionist fiction concerned with the sexual exploitation of slave women.

Child quickly dismisses the question of whether members of different races can genuinely inspire love in each other, refocusing attention on the more pressing issue: personal

¹⁸ Child republished “The Quadroons” in her 1846 collection of short stories *Fact and Fiction*. She made minor changes to phrasing but no major changes to plot or characters. The most significant change she made was to omit the final paragraph of the original version, in which she directly indicts slavery, saying, “Believe me, scenes like these are of no unfrequent occurrence at the South. The world does not afford such material for tragic romance, as the history of the Quadroons” (141). Perhaps thinking this ending too harsh for the expanded readership she intended to reach with *Fact and Fiction*, Child removed this paragraph from the 1846 edition. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations come from the 1842 *Liberty Bell* version of the story.

choice aside, Edward and Rosalie legally cannot contract marriage—both because miscegenation laws prohibit such a contract across the color line and because, as Child later reveals, Rosalie is a slave. Portraying Edward and Rosalie’s relationship as one of “Love in the best sense” satisfies the nineteenth-century requirements for contracting marriage. Child initially leaves the details of Rosalie’s slave or free status a mystery to heighten the sense of mutual affection between Edward and Rosalie. As the story is set in Georgia, readers might assume that Rosalie is Edward’s slave, but Child undermines this reading by revealing only toward the end of the story that Rosalie, unbeknownst to her, is the daughter of a slave mistress whose master/lover had promised manumission but carelessly forgotten to legalize his promise. Readers must conclude that Rosalie believes herself a free person of color. The relationship between Rosalie and Edward, then, is not that of master and slave but of consensual lovers. Leaving the details of Rosalie’s slave status vague until later in the story allows Child to emphasize the natural affection between her lovers, downplaying the abuse narrative inherent in a master-slave relationship. It also allows her to insist upon the voluntary contract into which Edward and Rosalie enter, a contract that, if both parties were white, would be considered a marriage. “Rosalie’s conscience required an outward form of marriage,” Child writes, “though she well knew that a union with her proscribed race was unrecognized by law, and therefore the ceremony gave her no legal hold on Edward’s constancy” (117). The language of “ceremony” here implies the formation of an extralegal contract between Edward and Rosalie that has all but the legal ramifications of marriage. Though Edward and Rosalie have contracted marriage, the “ceremony” has no weight without the public sanction of law. A marriage contracted out of natural affection but without legal protection is just as dangerous, Child implies, as a marriage contracted by law but in absence of affection, as Holgate argues. Laws that prohibit certain

marriages but grant privileges and protection to other marriages ensure that marriage is not merely a matter of two individuals making a private contract. Marriage, as Child's story reveals, is always a three-party contract—man, woman, and nation—because the nation must agree to give legal protection to the union just as much as the man and woman must agree to honor the union between them.

Naive Rosalie, with her “high, poetic nature [that] regarded the reality rather than the semblance of things,” mistakenly assumes that marriage is simply a matter of private choice when she proclaims to Edward, “my own soul will be satisfied, without the protection of the state” (117). However, she soon realizes that the “reality of things” means nothing without the “protection of the state” to declare the truth of that reality (118). Too late does Rosalie realize that a real marriage is always a public contract with legal and political ramifications. Ten years into their happy “marriage,” Edward, “now twenty-eight years old,” finds that “ambition had for some time been slowly gaining ascendancy over his other feelings [...] [H]e had thrown himself into political excitement, with all the honest fervor of youthful feeling” (121). His political involvement leads to a change in his entire character as he becomes “involved in movements which his frank nature would have once abhorred” (121). Edward, who once voluntarily upheld his contract with Rosalie, heedless of the fact that the law did not require him to do so, now seizes upon his lack of contractual obligation to abandon his “wife” for personal advantage. Child reveals that Edward's privilege in this moment consists not simply in his ability to “throw himself into political excitement” by running for office but in his right to leave Rosalie without facing legal consequences.

Child makes perfectly clear the fact that endogamous marriage enhances the privileges that Edward already enjoys as a white man. “Among those on whom his political success most

depended was a very popular and wealthy man, who had an only daughter,” and Edward quickly recognizes the benefits that will follow from this advantageous connection (121). Though his “visits to the house were at first of a purely political nature,” Edward awakens to Charlotte’s interest in him as well as his own interest in the “great worldly advantages connected with a union” to his ally’s daughter (121, 122). His courtship with Charlotte continues to be “of a purely political nature” since it is devoid of that natural affection he feels for Rosalie. While he finds her attractive as a contrast to Rosalie, Edward still acknowledges Charlotte to be “inferior in beauty;” his alliance with Charlotte is purely that: an alliance confirmed by marriage and lacking that affection Holgate deems necessary to contract marriage (122). “[W]eakened in moral principle,” Edward does exactly as Holgate’s unnatural amalgamators do in *Sojourn*: he marries against his affections for the sake of accomplishing a political goal, in this case his own career advancement (122). Child inverts anti-abolitionist logic. Having already proven the genuineness of Edward and Rosalie’s mutual affection, Child has Edward marry a white woman against his natural inclinations to demonstrate her point—that the law allows, even encourages, this perversion of marriage while discouraging marriages based on preference if that preference happens to cross the color line. Despite ten years and a child together, Edward abandons Rosalie and Xarifa because he is “unfettered by laws of the land” (122-123). In this best-case scenario, Edward permits his nonwhite family to continue living in their home at his own expense, but the real events on which Child modeled the story likely had more dire consequences than desertion. Deprived of a white male provider, the nonwhite family could make no legal claims for support or to property because of the illegitimate status awarded them by law.

Whereas Holgate envisions a city where forced amalgamation perverts natural affections by contracting marriage for unconsenting individuals, Child suggests that marriage relations have

already been perverted by miscegenation laws that deny natural affections and create illegitimate families. Furthermore, the insistence upon racially endogamous marriages as the only legally countenanced relationships amounts to a political tool designed to reinforce white supremacy. As Peggy Pascoe notes, “The laws were written to prohibit Whites from marrying Blacks, Asian Americans, and Indians but not to prohibit Blacks from marrying Asian Americans, or Asian Americans from marrying Indians” (8).¹⁹ Miscegenation law existed purely to protect white privilege by “channel[ing] property, propriety, personal choice, and legitimate procreation into one very particular kind of monogamous marital pair: couples that were made up of one White man and one White woman, whose sameness of race was required by law and whose difference of sex was taken entirely for granted” (Pascoe 3). The difference between anti-abolitionist scenarios like Holgate’s and Child’s is that Holgate’s novel portrays a fictional imagining of the politicization of marriage in a post-emancipation city, whereas Child claims that “scenes like these are of no unfrequent occurrence at the South” (141). Marriage, Child asserts, is already a governmentally regulated contract that has been harnessed to meet the ends of the very people who claim marriage to be purely a matter of private choice. Attempts to privatize and depoliticize marriage really work to shut down debates that would expose the publicly regulated and politically significant aspects of marriage.

Edward and Rosalie’s marriage narrative renders visible the invisible structures of white supremacy governing and gaining protection from marriage laws. In this regard, the story is, as

¹⁹ Pascoe’s study begins with the Civil War and continues into the twentieth century. However, her ideas about miscegenation laws equally apply the antebellum period. A more extensive application of her arguments to the antebellum period could yield interesting results. While miscegenation laws did exist in the antebellum North, many states had repealed them by the early nineteenth century, and the abolitionists pushed until the outbreak of the Civil War to have miscegenation laws in the North struck down. After the war, extensive and concerted efforts to have miscegenation laws repealed largely disappeared as more and more states began reinforcing or reinstating these laws. A different study might consider the meaning and purpose behind these historical changes.

Karen Weierman points out, “a Northern story masked as a Southern tale, an allegory” for the illegitimacy of intermarriages created by miscegenation laws, “the very situation the New England abolitionists were agitating against” (150). But Child’s story also contains a tale of Southern slavery that addresses amalgamation in the sexual sense of the term. Real amalgamation, implies Child, stems not from intermarriage but from the condoned rape of enslaved women. Scholars have noted that the multigenerational structure of “The Quadroons” enables readers to see the enduring legacy of slavery, but this structure also allows Child to engage with the dual meanings of amalgamation. Through Rosalie’s romanticized “marriage” to her white suitor Edward, Child responds to anti-abolitionist rhetoric that claimed, first, that genuine affection between the races was impossible and, second, that marriage was an entirely private, nonpolitical choice. Conversely, Xarifa’s story speaks to abolitionist concerns over the sexual abuse of slave women. After Rosalie’s death from grief, Edward installs her in the cottage with a mammy-like caregiver and a harp teacher. Initially, Xarifa’s relationship with her English harp teacher, George Elliot, seems to repeat her mother’s and grandmother’s interracial romances, with the notable exception that George is English instead of American. This slight difference could spell freedom for Xarifa, as her father, who “had more than once thought what a pleasant thing it would be, if English freedom from prejudice should lead [George] to offer legal protection” to Xarifa, well knew (134-135).

At the moment when Xarifa might obtain permanent freedom through a relationship with George, Child’s story morphs into a purely Southern tale. Rosalie’s status as slave surfaces as white heirs to her father’s estate seek salvation from their financial crisis. As in most tragic mulatta plots, the white patriarch’s careless failure to legalize his mistress’s manumission results in the unwitting daughter or granddaughter’s enslavement. With Rosalie dead, the heirs discover

their claim on Xarifa and immediately seize her for sale at auction. George, away on a visit to his mother, receives word of events too late, and in his absence, her father already dead, no one arrives to save Xarifa from the auction block. A “wealthy profligate, who was determined to obtain her at any price,” purchases Xarifa to serve as his mistress (138). Though he initially “sought to win her favor, by flattery and presents,” her master’s mood changes when Xarifa tries to escape with George (138). Forewarned by a treacherous slave, the master shoots George as he awaits Xarifa’s descent from her window, and he locks Xarifa in her room. Despite her master’s efforts to rouse her from despondency, Xarifa persists in her depression. Finally, “He grew weary of her obstinacy, as he was please to term it; and threats took the place of persuasion” (140). A series of seven asterisks separates this line from the beginning of the next paragraph, in which we are told that, “In a few months more, Xarifa was a raving manic” (141). Literally reading the silence between the lines leads to the inference that Xarifa has been raped by her master. “That pure temple [...] desecrated,” Xarifa commits suicide, as dictated by nineteenth-century standards of true womanhood, by breaking her head against a wall (141).

Xarifa’s sudden seizure as a slave, her trials on the auction block, and her final rape and suicide remind readers of the horrors of slavery that abolitionists regularly worked to expose, but Rosalie’s sentimentalized intermarriage tragedy speaks to Northern issues of racial prejudice and inequality. The twin structure of “The Quadroons” enables Child to approach amalgamation from the perspective of interracial sex and intermarriage and address issues posed by abolitionists and anti-abolitionists alike. Readers had become familiar with stories like Xarifa’s. The first known anti-slavery novel, Richard Hildreth’s *The Slave; or Memoir of Archy Moore*, published in 1836, presented similar themes of the slave woman’s rape, and abolitionist women had been broaching the issue in their writings and speeches since Child had been bold enough to

discuss it in her *Appeal*. Xarifa's story meets readerly expectations, but Rosalie's tragedy was a shocking first for American literature. Child's sympathetic portrayal of an interracial marriage, destroyed by laws that refused to countenance domestic arrangements that already existed, radically exposed the public policing of marriage as well as the political function of endogamous marriage and miscegenation laws that worked to exclude nonwhites from the national family.²⁰ She concisely captured abolitionist rationale behind repealing miscegenation laws: these laws exist solely to support white supremacy and create racial inequality. If the ideal of racial equality was ever to be achieved, these laws had to be repealed.

Considering "Quadroons" alongside *Sojourn* contextualized Child's own intermarriage fiction as a response to a larger cultural discourse about amalgamation. Child turns Holgate's effort to portray endogamous marriage as the "natural" result of private choices on its head with "Quadroons." Though many scholars, and, indeed, even Child herself, claim that her interracial marriage plots function to "refine[] [her] message in order to make it more appealing to a predominantly female audience," Child does not turn to marriage simply because it avoids the reality of rape and therefore makes her writing more palatable to genteel white women (Levy 143).²¹ Child proved time and again that she was more than willing to openly confront her

²⁰ As discussed in an earlier footnote, Child had been experimenting with interracial marriage narratives since the beginning of her career. "The Quadroons" interestingly differs from Child's best known work of interracial fiction before 1842, *Hobomok*, in that both Rosalie and Edward appear to be completely sound minded in their choice of a lover of a different race. *Hobomok* scandalized readers by having the white female protagonist marry a Native American man. The only redeeming quality of the match for many readers seemed to be that Child portrays the female protagonist as nearly deranged with grief in the moment she chooses to marry Hobomok. When her mental stability returns, Mary begins to regret her rash decision. While Edward does regret his decision to "marry" Rosalie because it limits his political aspirations, Child clearly portrays Edward as sound minded during his initial courtship of a mixed-race bride.

²¹ Carolyn Karcher claims, "In 'The Quadroons,' Child sought to create a literary form capable of appealing to the very sensibilities that prevented 'fashionable, exclusive, and delicate-nerved ladies' from inquiring into the condition of their enslaved sisters" (*First Woman* 335). Child described "The Quadroons" as sounding "more like a girl of sixteen, than a woman of forty" but claimed "the young and romantic will like it." Her embarrassment at her own hyper-sentimentalism evident, she explains, "I was plagued to death for a subject, and happened to hit upon one that involved much love-making" (qtd. in Karcher, *First Woman* 336). Like subsequent critics of her work, Child

readers with the rape of enslaved women, both in fact and fiction. Both her *Appeal* and short story “Slavery’s Pleasant Homes” deal directly with the problem of sexual abuse as a byproduct of slavery. Child’s turn to interracial marriage plots, therefore, is more than an attempt to “whiten” her mulatta heroines.²² When contextualized within contemporary debates about emancipation, amalgamation, and the political function of marriage, Child’s choice of the interracial marriage plot challenges anti-abolitionist narratives that attempt to privatize and depoliticize marriage. “The Quadroons” portrays marriage as an inherently political, and therefore public, choice that held real consequences for white male privilege. Reading “Quadroons” beside *Sojourn* reveals the extent to which contemporary debates surrounding amalgamation were less about white women’s virtue or black men’s bestiality than white men’s privilege, which was maintained through the illegality of interracial marriage. More importantly than codifying the tragic mulatta archetype, Child’s story invents a genre in which future authors can question the connections between marriage and white male privilege.

In 1843, after over a decade of struggle on the part of abolitionists, Massachusetts repealed its miscegenation law. This accomplishment symbolized a step toward the elimination of racial prejudice, but as many abolitionist attitudes during the amalgamation debates demonstrated, the repeal of miscegenation laws was only a symbolic act. Abolitionists actively resisted claims that they promoted intermarriage. Paradoxically, both anti-abolitionists and Child

seems not to realize the extent to which her choice of theme was influenced by contemporary discourses on interracial marriage.

²² Early scholars of the tragic mulatta genre argued that Child, and others who adopted her formula, purposely portrayed the slave heroine as near-white to help readers identify better with her. As Robert Bone argues, “Such novels [...] contain mulatto characters for whom the reader’s sympathies are aroused less because they are colored than because they are nearly white” (22-23). This mentality pervaded scholarship until more recently, when scholars like Teresa Zackodnik have argued that the tragic mulatta is not a “whitened ideal” but a “liminal figure” who challenges dominant ideas about race and womanhood (xii). Zackodnik notes that the Black Arts Movement likewise dismissed the tragic mulatta figure, believing that she promoted the privilege of white skin rather than the struggle of black female existence.

could see that intermarriage alone would pave the way for racial equality, or perhaps abolitionists did realize the political power of intermarriage to end prejudice. As the next chapter will discuss, all whites benefitted from the privileges protected by endogamous marriage. Though abolitionists were keen on ending prejudice in theory, their less-than-enthusiastic responses to Child's final novel suggest their own investment in the systems of white supremacy that perpetuated such privileges.

Chapter 2

“Manhood Rights” and Marriage Rites: Whiteness as Property in *Clotel* and *The Garies and Their Friends*

Among the first African Americans to publish novels, William Wells Brown and Frank J. Webb, both chose to adopt the interracial sentimental genre made popular by white female authors, most prominently Lydia Maria Child and Harriet Beecher Stowe.¹ Scholars like Ann duCille, Eve Allegra Raimon, and Tess Chakkalakal, among others, have puzzled over this decision, trying to understand why, in the 1850s, a time when questions of slavery, freedom, and democratic rights occupied the writing and speaking of other African Americans, Brown and Webb seemingly sidestepped these issues by writing marriage plots.² These authors all offer explanations of the function of the marriage plot in Brown and Webb’s work, but none of them think of marriage as a means by which Brown and Webb can discuss the same manhood rights that concerned contemporary African American men. I argue that Brown and Webb productively entangle marriage with more familiar “manhood” rights that concerned other African Americans in the 1850s. Marriage, more specifically the marriage contract, becomes the means by which Brown and Webb contemplate masculine democratic rights, including freedom (ownership of the self), political participation (a stake in the nation), and property (legal entitlements due from freedom and political personhood). Scholars have not sufficiently recognized how marriage

¹ Other African American novels published around the same time or shortly thereafter, such as *The Bondswoman’s Narrative* by Hannah Craft and *The Curse of Caste* by Julia C. Collins, feature similar plot points about interracial romance, tragic mulattas, and passing.

² DuCille primarily focuses on the black female characters in Brown’s text, arguing that marriage defines freedom for African American women in the novel. In her chapter on Brown, Chakkalakal concludes that interracial marriage offers liberation from the strict standards imposed upon marriage between whites. Her chapter on Webb focuses on marriage in the free black community. Raimon considers interracial marriage important only because it allows Brown to introduce the tragic mulatta, who she argues becomes Brown’s means of troubling categories of identity in the antebellum United States.

functions in these works because they have largely overlooked the interracial marriage plot in favor of parallel or sub-plots. As a result, they have also failed to understand the importance of the role of the white suitor in each of these novels. Through the white suitor, Brown and Webb question whether democratic rights are truly innate to white masculinity, as white supremacists claimed. They destroy the argument that democratic rights are available to all white men by demonstrating how these rights can be lost as well as gained. In their novels, these rights become the byproduct not only of the oppression and enslavement of nonwhites but also of the punishment of whites who do not support social norms by marrying endogamously. This interest in whiteness and marriage is not without pertinence to the struggles of the black community. By revealing the marital underpinning of white male democratic rights, Brown and Webb emphasize the importance of marriage rights, even over suffrage or property ownership, for African American men looking to gain democratic rights.

Though recent scholars of whiteness—including Noel Ignatiev, Theodore Allen, and Matthew Frye Jacobson—have noted how a white identity and its status benefits may be gained by replicating white attitudes and behaviors, scholars like David Roediger have argued that, “in a society in which downward mobility was a constant fear,” “one might lose everything but not whiteness” (Roediger 60). Whiteness studies recognize that white identity can be both an innate property resulting from ancestry and an earned property gained through a combination of skin color and performance. What these studies have overlooked as a possibility is exactly the question Brown and Webb explore through the white suitors in their novels: can a white identity, and, by proxy, the rights of white masculinity, be lost? Their engagement with and answers to this question mark Brown and Webb as important shapers of the nineteenth-century literary conversation on race. Through their development of the white suitor, Brown and Webb posit the

alienability of white identity. If white identity and the rights associated with it can be lost, then these rights may not be innately tied to white men.

To discuss whiteness as an identity that entitles the possessor to certain benefits, I borrow the concise phrase “whiteness as property” from Cheryl Harris. In her article, “Whiteness as Property,” she argues that whiteness has been treated, both legally and socially, as a form of intangible property that “automatically ensured higher economic returns in the short term, as well as greater economic, political, and social security in the long run” (1713). Indeed, within these novels, it is this property in whiteness that entitles white male characters to certain rights, including protection of private property, political participation, access to legal recourse and public services, and protection from physical assault, all of which the African American characters are denied. Although Harris argues that this property is innate within any skin legally and socially recognized as white, my reading of these novels expands this theory. *Clotel* and *The Garies and Their Friends* reveal how whiteness is performed through choice of a marriage partner and confirmed by marriage vows. Marrying white women affirms property in whiteness and additionally ensures that any offspring, particularly males, will also be born with this property and will be entitled to the same rights.³

Despite his own experience of and escape from slavery, Brown’s position within the African American literary tradition has been tenuous at best. As Ann duCille notes in her article, “Where in the World is William Wells Brown? Thomas Jefferson, Sally Hemings, and the DNA of African-American History,” African American scholars’ fraught relationship with Brown’s

³ While it lies beyond the scope of my dissertation, my idea of the marriage contract as a validation of white male identity could be productively applied to white paranoia of black men marrying white women. If black men could marry white women, then their own access to democratic rights would be confirmed. Conversely, if their rights were not affirmed by marrying white women, then neither would white men’s rights be affirmed through the marriage contract.

works stems in large part from the fact that his literary productions are “[o]ften historically inaccurate and heavily dependent on the borrowed conventions of ‘white’ sentimental fiction” (453). In particular, *Clotel*, with its many passages directly lifted from Child’s “The Quadroons,” “has never quite walked the party line of black experience” (“Where,” duCille 453). Because Brown draws heavily from the predominantly white female genre of sentimental fiction, Addison Gayle accuses Brown of merely having replicated stereotyped images of African Americans as submissive and childlike or barbaric (6). Likewise, feminist critics charge Brown with reducing “female characters merely to symbols of oppression,” “blaming him for institutionalizing the image of the tragic mulatta that dominates early African-American fiction” (Mitchell 11, “Where,” duCille 455). Instead of “moving The Novel in the right direction” by creating a uniquely African American literary tradition, early scholars of Brown claim that he hindered African American literature by capitulating to “the romantic aspirations of the black middle class” and, more importantly, by embracing white female literary conventions that, as a result of Brown’s example, would continue to influence African American writing throughout the nineteenth century (Gayle 6).

More recently, literary criticism has turned toward the notion of “whiteface,” or masking, as a way of understanding why early African American authors like Brown adopted white models of writing: “by writing in ‘whiteface’ these early black writers reach an audience familiar with their literary styles, if not their social objectives,” but in doing so, “they ran the risk of disappearing into their own performances” (Zafar 4). “Whiteface” enables African American authors to repackage their alien “social objectives” in a form that white readers can recognize. Awareness of this literary technique has led African American scholars to recuperate Brown, celebrating his would-be plagiarisms as “stunning example[s] of literary pastiche” that “subvert

and transform the very discourses that he imports into his novel” (Levine, “Cultural” 7). In many ways, Brown now epitomizes the masked discourse customary of African American writing in a white dominated culture. A proliferation of new work examines Brown’s “trickster” figures not as simple replications of African American stereotypes but as refutations of these stereotypes that reveal race as “something that is ‘performed’ within racist culture” (Levine, “Cultural” 23).⁴

Notwithstanding the emergence of these new readings, many of the scholars who write about Brown are still hesitant to discuss the recurrence of interracial relationships or the preponderance of white suitors in his novels. Ann duCille’s *Coupling Convention* was the first major exception, but few have followed duCille’s study. In her book, Eve Allegra Raimon considers Brown’s revisions of Child’s tragic mulatta tale, but she brushes aside the interracial relationship itself as well as the white suitor. More recently, Tess Chakkalakal has written about “slave-marriage” in *Clotel*. While she does discuss Clotel’s relationship with Horatio, she never mentions the racial difference between the two or considers them an interracial couple. She also problematically applies her term “slave-marriage,” which she defines as a marriage “outside the purview of legal forms of marriage,” to their relationship, despite the fact that Horatio is not and never has been a slave (1).⁵ Though “slave-marriage” provides critics with a vocabulary to talk about extralegal marriage, it also obscures the fact that nearly all of the marriages depicted in

⁴ For recent readings of Brown’s minstrel figures see Geoffry Sanborn’s “The Plagiarist’s Craft: Fugitivity and Theatricality in Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom” (2013), Clay M. Hooper’s “‘It Is Good to Be Shifty’: William Wells Brown’s Trickster Critique of Black Autobiography” (2009), Makoto Igakura’s “From Black Sam to Master Sam: William Wells Brown’s Revision of Uncle Tom’s Cabin in *Clotel*” (2000), Paul Gilmore’s “‘De Genewine Artekil’: William Wells Brown, Blackface Minstrelsy, and Abolitionism” (1997), and Rafia Zafar’s *We Wear the Mask* (1997) to name only a few. Reading Brown’s stereotyped African American characters as subversive performers has become popular in the last decade of scholarship.

⁵ Chakkalakal uses her term “slave-marriage” simply to mean extralegal, marriage-like relationships. While a useful term for discussing marriages between slaves, this term nominally implies that the marriage exists only between two slaves rather than between a master and his slave woman. The term has its uses, but it also has its limitations, which seem to become blatantly obvious when Chakkalakal fails to consider the race, class, and power differentials between Horatio and Clotel. “Slave-marriage” ascribes more equality to interracial relationships than Brown’s novel would suggest.

Clotel involve slave women and free white men. Such terminology, then, does not help us interrogate interracial marriage or whiteness; in fact, it may lead us to gloss over these issues entirely. Overall, this general silence on interracial relationships and the role of white suitors is as telling as the early African American and feminist critiques of the novel that failed to dig below the surface of Brown's race and gender stereotypes. To fully understand Brown's brilliance and the extent of his double-voiced critiques, scholars must begin to interrogate the purpose of these interracial relationships rather than explaining them away as vestiges of Brown's reliance on Child and Stowe.⁶ Focusing on interracial relationships in *Clotel* leads us to what might be an uncomfortable conclusion for some critics: that this first African American novelist wrote as much about white experience and what it means to be white as he did about blackness.

Using the theory of "whiteface" to look beneath the "borrowed conventions of 'white' sentimental fiction" that characterize the interracial relationships in *Clotel*, we see that Brown subversively uses these relationships to analyze the position and power of white men as citizens with democratic rights. More than merely critiquing their access to these rights, Brown recasts these democratic "rights" to reveal them for what they really are: privileges limited to white men, rather than rights accessible to all. Furthermore, he begins to expose the source of and limits to this white male privilege, which has its basis in the marriage contract. Through his white suitors, Brown asks if the democratic privileges of masculinity are inherent properties of whiteness, if

⁶ I borrow "double voice" from Teresa Zackodnik, who builds on Carla Peterson's definition of the term. Zackodnik uses the term to refer to the discourse African Americans constructed that borrowed from dominant white discourses to both make their own narratives more recognizable to white audiences and to challenge the power given to that dominant discourse. She applies this term to African American women's writing and speaking, but the term helpfully illuminates how Brown likewise "negotiated dual 'traditions,' signifying on existing tropes or motifs within contemporary genres for alternative purposes" (xviii). Brown invokes the tradition of sentimental fiction in his novel to appeal to a white audience while simultaneously questioning the very ground upon which their white identity stands. Even though Brown uses the literary modes made popular by Child and Stowe, he repurposes them as a vehicle to express his meditations on whiteness.

they can be earned by performance, and if they can be lost by improper performance.⁷ In adopting a white female literary tradition and adapting its feminized subject matter to masculine concerns, Brown covertly probes the undergirding of white male privilege without overtly challenging it.

If scholars have had a fraught relationship with Brown's work, then they have had limited to no relationship with Frank J. Webb's only novel until fairly recently. *The Garies and Their Friends* slipped into obscurity shortly after its publication in 1857. However, "Prompted in part by Claudia Tate and Ann duCille's reassessments of the cultural work of marriage in black women's fiction, *The Garies and Their Friends* is currently experiencing something of a literary renaissance" (Chakkalakal 49). Interest in Webb's novel has grown as scholars of African American literature realize the importance of this text for revealing free black life and attitudes, especially toward marriage, in the antebellum United States. For instance, in "The Property of Blackness: The Legal Fiction of Frank J. Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends*," Elizabeth Stockton compellingly argues that "Webb depicts the ways that marriage can secure African American male self-possession" (473). Jeffery Clymer similarly uses the novel as a window into how nineteenth-century property inheritance laws functioned to keep "family money" white by denying claims made by mixed race family members.⁸

Despite the variety of scholarship that has been produced on Webb's novel, critics have not yet offered a sustained analysis of the novel's title character: Mr. Garie himself. As the

⁷ I say the democratic privileges of masculinity here not because I believe these privileges are or should be the province of men but to reflect the nineteenth-century reality. In the antebellum era, only white men had access to these "universal" privileges. Though they were not always able to exercise their democratic privileges, African American men gained legal access to these rights before women, white or black, did.

⁸ Given the way that the novel jumps between at least four different but intertwined plot lines, *Garies* offers plenty of material for analysis. New work has begun to explore a wide variety of topics ranging from depictions of the Irish (Anna Engle) to descriptions of food (Samuel Otter) and many things in between. Most analyses focus on the novel's oppressed but thriving black community, spending very little time discussing the interracial marriage central to the story or the white man responsible for making that marriage possible.

eponymous hero, Garie fulfills the role of protagonist until his death halfway through the novel. The effect of his interracial relationship on white male identity forms the primary focus of the first half of the novel. Because the novel opens with the unfolding of a stereotypical tragic mulatta plot as Emily Garie, former slave turned “wife” and matron, presses her husband, Clarence Garie, to relocate to a Northern state, scholars tend to focus on Emily’s failed interracial love story, contrasting it with the success stories of other African American women in the text who marry within their race. Though Stockton argues that “almost all of the novel’s action is propelled by Emily Garie’s desire to have a legally recognized marriage and fulfill the role of protected wife and mother rather than the role of slave and concubine,” readers learn very little about Emily beyond her desire for legal marriage and freedom for her children (475). Emily’s inner workings rarely make an appearance in the novel; her husband’s thoughts and feelings, however, frequently take center stage. Webb pushes the mixed-race woman to the background, leaving her as little more than a sketch of a character, in favor of focusing on her white husband, the free African American community of Philadelphia, and later, the Garie children. Considering the number of pages Webb devotes to Clarence Garie’s character, this gap in scholarship needs to be filled with a sustained critique of Garie’s role in the text.

Focusing on Garie’s plight as he struggles to legalize his marriage, protect his wife and children, and provide them with the privileges available to him as a wealthy white man opens new avenues of analysis in the novel. Throughout the novel, Garie assumes his own ability to access certain “democratic rights” as a propertied white man. He further assumes that these rights should be fully extendable to his mixed-race family. The novel continually undermines Garie’s assumptions, revealing these democratic rights to be privileges conditionally granted to white men. As Garie violates the conditions of his democratic rights first by legally marrying a

black woman and subsequently by attempting to use them to benefit his nonwhite family, he loses these rights. Webb contrasts Garie's loss of privilege with the lower-class Irishmen who gain access to white democratic rights by acting in the interest of upper-class whites, represented in the novel by George Stevens. In this way, Webb suggests that racial identities are in a constant state of flux. Three key arguments, then, emerge from a reading of white masculinity in *The Garies*: the "democratic rights" claimed by white men across classes are actually privileges conveyed by a property in whiteness; if one appears white, a property in whiteness can be gained by aligning oneself with the ideologies of white men; and, most importantly, a property in whiteness can be alienated by failing to perform in accordance with these ideologies. My reading of *Garies* suggests the importance of the marriage contract in defining who can and cannot have a property in whiteness. By marrying a black woman, Garie forfeits his property in whiteness, the privileges of which include the protection of his private property. Webb's novel reveals the marriage contract to be at the heart of sociopolitical structures and institutions that protect and perpetuate democratic rights as the exclusive privileges of white men.

"I Would Not, if I Could, Hold You by a Single Fetter": Marriage Rights and Masculinity in Clotel

Born a slave in Lexington, Kentucky, around 1814, William Wells Brown escaped from slavery in 1834. In 1849, Brown left the United States to begin a lecture tour of Britain. The enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850 forced Brown to remain in Britain until 1854, when abolitionist friends purchased his freedom to ensure his return to the United States without fear of re-enslavement. He published his first novel, *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter*, in 1853 while still in London. With its direct indictment of Thomas Jefferson as the white suitor who fails to arrange for his slave children's freedom, *Clotel* provides a daring critique of white male

privilege and slavery. Told from the third person perspective, the novel follows a number of enslaved, near-white female characters that might be considered tragic mulattas. The story opens immediately following Jefferson's death with the imminent sale of his slave mistress, Currer, and their teenage daughters, Clotel and Althesa, all of whom Jefferson has failed to emancipate. The fate of these three women consumes the majority of the novel, though Clotel's daughter, Mary, and Althesa's daughters, Ellen and Jane, feature prominently toward the end of the novel. As important to Brown as his enslaved female characters are their white suitors. Through these white suitors, Brown does more than simply critique white male privilege in *Clotel*; he excavates the foundation of that privilege to reveal the ground upon which it stands and forces white readers to confront the uncomfortable reality that white male privilege is not the result of an innate property in whiteness but of a proper performance of white identity, confirmed primarily through marriage to a white woman.

Brown uses the “feminine subject of marriage[...] as a means of exposing the horrors of chattel slavery” so much that duCille concludes that “marriage rites and the right to marry—rather than such ‘manhood rights’ as suffrage, property ownership, or literacy—function as the primary signifiers of freedom and humanity” in Brown's *Clotel; or the President's Daughter* (duCille, *Coupling* 19). While I agree with her conclusion that marriage acts as the sign of “freedom and humanity” in the text, implicit in duCille's argument is an assumption that, because he focuses so much on the feminized topic of marriage, Brown does not engage “manhood rights” or, if he does, he engages them separately from marriage. Chakkalalal seems to pick up on this implication when she similarly argues, “Compared with the preeminent rights that slaves were denied—the right to vote and to own their own bodies and labor—the denial of their right to marry was of less transcendent, yet more immediate, importance” (2). Both scholars

seem to conclude that marriage rights are somehow different or separate from, perhaps even less important than, democratic rights to suffrage and property.⁹ They agree that, despite what readers might expect from a recently escaped slave asserting his black masculinity, marriage rights form the core of Brown's novel. In fairness to duCille, while she does seem to imply that marriage is a separate issue from "manhood rights," at no point does she suggest that marriage is of less importance than these rights, as Chakkalakal does. At the seeming opposite end of the spectrum, Ivy Wilson claims that "*Clotel* needs to be thought of as a mid-nineteenth century African-American theorization of democracy" (39). In *Specters of Democracy*, Wilson argues that "race informed how citizenship was conceptualized and practiced, even in free states where slavery was not institutionalized" (6). His reading places questions of race-related citizenship rights at the heart of Brown's novel. Marriage does not factor largely in his understanding of democratic concerns in *Clotel*. Wilson's analysis may initially appear to be at odds with duCille and Chakkalakal's work but can be reconciled if we think of marriage as one of the means by which Brown theorizes democratic rights.

I want to challenge duCille and Chakkalakal's assumptions that marriage is a "feminized subject" for Brown, that it replaces concerns with "such 'manhood rights' as suffrage [and] property ownership" displayed by other African American male authors, or that it is "of less transcendent [...] importance" than ownership of one's body (duCille 19). Marriage forms the basis of these "manhood rights," or democratic rights as Wilson would call them, including protection of private property (and one's body), inheritance rights, and political participation.

The most productive reading of democracy and marriage in *Clotel* sees the two as mutually

⁹ While Chakkalakal offers many important insights into the function of marriage in *Clotel*, she never explains why marriage might be "of less transcendent, yet more immediate, importance" either to Brown or to the antebellum African American community. This point calls for clarification since I read marriage, the ability to give one's body to another person, as the primary signifier of political rights as well as ownership of one's body in this text.

constitutive: democratic rights give white men access to marriage rights and marriage rights both proclaim and expand the democratic rights of white men. By establishing the marriage contract as the basis of white male democratic rights, Brown implies that access to marriage rights may form the basis of black male rights and suggests the direction African American arguments for equality need to take, a direction other leading African American men largely overlooked. For instance, Frederick Douglass merely side notes his marriage to Anna at the end of his 1845 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, but he offers a copy of his marriage certificate at the end of the narrative to substantiate his freedom (Chakkalakal 15). Though Douglass does not foreground the importance of marriage in his text, the inclusion of his marriage license implies the importance of marriage for attaining and proving the democratic rights central to his definition of black male freedom. Brown takes a different approach from Douglass and other leading African American men when he positions marriage at the center of the fight for freedom and equality.¹⁰

Interracial relationships take center stage in the novel from the very first sentence, where Brown cites the “fearful increase of half whites” “whose fathers are slaveowners, and their mothers slaves” (Brown 81). His interest in the position of white men involved in these relationships likewise becomes immediately clear in the second sentence as he explains that “Society does not frown upon the man who sits with his mulatto child upon his knee, whilst its mother stands a slave behind his chair” (81). White men involved with their slave women

¹⁰ Marriage, as Frances Smith Foster reveals, played an important role in the antebellum African American community. Foster cites myriad articles from the black periodical *Freedom's Journal* that deal with questions of marriage for free African Americans (*Til xv*). Brown's emphasis on marriage aligns with the sentiments expressed in periodicals written for an African American readership by African Americans. However, Brown does something different from these periodicals first by directing his novel toward a white audience and second by discussing interracial marriage between white men and mixed-race slave women. By doing so, he shifts the discussion away from the democratic rights denied to African American men and onto the not-so-innate democratic rights of white men. Brown exposes these rights as contingent upon the enactment of certain roles, particularly marriage roles.

continue to enjoy their privileged positions without consequence, but as Brown will later work to prove, retention of this privileged position depends as much upon the slave woman standing “behind his chair” as it does upon the white wife sitting by his side. So long as the black woman “stands a slave behind his chair,” white America overlooks the master’s mulatto child. In *Clotel*, problems arise when white men allow black women to occupy the seat of the white wife, even if momentarily. Through its many depictions of marriage, *Clotel* explores the democratic privileges that can be gained, lost, or fundamentally denied either through legally protected or forbidden marriage relationships.

Perhaps to underscore the ability of marriage to legitimize or illegitimize white masculinity as well as the mulatto child, Brown moves immediately into a contemplation of what the legality of marriage means for white versus black Americans. “The marriage relation,” Brown reminds readers, “the oldest and most sacred institution given to man by his creator, is unknown and unrecognized in the slave laws of the United States” (82). Speaking from his position as a disenfranchised, partial citizen, Brown sees the inability to marry and receive legal protection for that union as the fundamental sign of democratic exclusion and the enslavement of “body and soul” (82). “Husband and wife,” Brown muses, “through each other become conscious of complete humanity,” so in robbing enslaved men and women of the marriage relationship, slaveholders dehumanize them and reduce them to “property” (83, 82). Conversely, he implies that marriage reinforces the ownership whites have of their own bodies; the ability to legally marry therefore becomes a primary signifier of freedom from enslavement.

The absence of marital rights has the power to turn people into property, but the right to marry secures property for people. Marriage not only defines the flow of property but provides a fundamental basis for property ownership, whether that be property inherited from legally

married parents, property transmitted to one spouse through another, or property accrued with the intention of legally passing it to future heirs. The right to marry therefore gives access to other democratic privileges, most importantly legal protection of property. Angelyn Mitchell correctly identifies “illegitimacy, the result of the ravaging of Black women,” as a primary concern in the novel, leading her to conclude that “slavery’s greatest atrocity, according to Brown, is the fracture of the enslaved African American’s family” (11). However, illegitimacy poses another “atrocity” for Brown: the lack of protected property rights for African Americans. Refusing slaves the right to marry delegitimizes all potential heirs, thereby denying enslaved people control over the transmission of any property they might have, most essentially property in their own bodies. However, the white slave owner with the mulatto child upon his knee finds himself equally bound by the illegitimacy of his relationship with his slave woman, as Brown’s novel will demonstrate. Legal marriage determines the ability to transfer property, even for this white man, meaning that his ability to provide for his mulatto child is governed not by his position as a white man but by the laws prohibiting interracial marriage. Marriage forms the foundation of this white slave owner’s rights in that, as long as he does not attempt to marry his slave woman, his relationship with her usually goes unfrowned upon, but it also limits his rights with regard to his illegitimate mistress and child.

Marriage also plays a vital role in establishing another of the “manhood rights” duCille names: suffrage. As the “first and most important institution of human existence—the foundation of all civilisation and culture—the root of church and state,” marriage connects the individual to the nation and provides the foundation for male voting rights (Brown 83). Nancy Cott clarifies the connection between individuals and the nation via intraracial, heterosexual marriage, explaining that

a man's full civil and political status consisted of being a husband and father and head of a household unit, representing himself and his dependents in the civic world. Wives and children did not represent themselves but looked to the male head of household to represent and support them, in return for which they owed their obedience and service. A man's headship of a family, his taking the responsibility for dependent wife and children, qualified him to be a participating member of a state. The political tradition thus built on monogamous marriage [...] In the 1850s it was not surprising for an essayist to observe: "The husband acquires from the union increased capacity and power. He represents the wife in the political and civil order." (7)

Marriage represents the source of white male privilege for Brown because, as Cott makes clear, it qualifies men to exercise their democratic rights by representing their dependents before the nation. Thus, the right to marry becomes a crucial manhood right because, without it, black men have no claim to the political rights accessible to white male representatives of families. Denying enslaved African American men the right to head legally protected families robbed them of a nineteenth-century masculine political identity, but Brown does not overtly write a novel about the disenfranchisement and emasculation of black men. In another important though understudied aspect of Brown's masking techniques, Brown approaches these marriage questions through his white male characters, all the while silently implying the disenfranchised black male position.

Though marriage privilege opens the door to other privileges, it also comes with a quid pro quo, a fact scholars have not considered before now. In exchange for democratic privileges as the head of a family, a white man must head the right kind of family, a family that consists only of individuals whom other white men would want connected to the nation. As Cott states, when a couple marries, "The public sees itself and its own interests reflected in the couple's action" (2). Because of the married couple's ability to reflect the nation back to itself, the public has a vested interest in defining what marriage looks like at an individual level. The people of the United States have controlled what the nation looks like by legally regulating who can get

married, to whom they can get married, and by socially policing those persons who abuse their marriage rights by marrying unsanctioned partners. I formulate this system of control as a contractual relationship, or, as I call it, the marriage contract, between white men and national institutions that support white male democratic rights. The interracial marriage plot allows Brown to consider what happens to supposedly innate privilege when white men violate the marriage contract by heading mixed-race families.

At least seven interracial relationships appear throughout *Clotel*, some described as “marriages,” others as coerced and exploitative master-slave relationships.¹¹ While each of these relationships allows Brown to portray a different aspect of the performance and privilege of white masculinity, it is in the relationship between Horatio Green and Clotel that Brown offers his most extensive meditation on how marriage affects white identity. From his larger theorizing of marriage, Brown moves immediately into describing Clotel’s relationship with her white suitor, Horatio. He transitions into his narrative so quickly that his introductory thoughts on marriage almost seem disjointed from the story of Horatio and Clotel’s budding love that follows. However, Brown’s speculations on the connection between democratic rights and marriage find their fullest expression in Horatio and Clotel’s relationship; the quick movement from pontification to concrete example provides readers with a lens through which to read the relationship. After briefly describing the circumstances that lead to her sale, Brown backtracks to explain the initial meeting between Clotel and Horatio. Explaining that Curren had raised “Clotel and [her sister] Althesa to attract attention, [...] especially at balls and parties,” the narrator reveals that these “balls and parties” are, in fact, “negro balls” “made up of quadroon and

¹¹ Clotel and Horatio, Althesa and Henry Morton, Curren and Thomas Jefferson, Jane and Volney Lapuc, Jane and her master, Ellen and her master, and a brief mention of a man named Buddington who marries the quadroon daughter of a wealthy merchant to access her fortune.

mulatto girls, and white men. These are democratic gatherings, where gentlemen, shopkeepers, and their clerks, all appear upon terms of perfect equality” (86). The description of these “gatherings” as democratic lends irony to the situation: these men are all equals in the pursuit of mixed-race, enslaved mistresses who have no other hope of escaping the depths of slavery than becoming a white man’s mistress. Brown implies that white male democratic rights are exercised and confirmed over the sexually available bodies of black women. As Wilson explains, “Brown’s story ironizes the ‘Negro ball’ as a nominal democratic space, one that can only be guaranteed when mulatta women become the device that instantiates the equivalency of white men as a homosocial constituency” (45). In this moment, he also exposes “democratic” rights as privileges available only to white men.

Tess Chakkalakal, however, takes Brown at his word when he describes these balls as “democratic gatherings,” suggesting that this early moment of equality “sets up a rather sharp contrast between the democratic and genteel circumstances that lead to Horatio and Clotel’s extralegal union with the unequal and undemocratic circumstances that eventually lead to his legal marriage with Gertrude” (24). She reads democratic possibilities in the “slave-marriage” between Horatio and Clotel; because it exists outside of legal regulations, their marriage offers Horatio and Clotel an opportunity to transcend prescribed gender roles. This analysis of the scene problematically ignores the always-implied barrier of race that exists between Horatio and Clotel. Indeed, Chakkalakal never mentions the racial difference between Horatio and Clotel, and even though she talks about their relationship as a “slave-marriage,” she never considers that Horatio is not a slave. His position as a wealthy white man in fact confers privileges upon him that are themselves a barrier to any sort of democratic equality between himself and Clotel. Whatever non-ironic democratic potential the relationship offers to Clotel at the moment of their

meeting at the “Negro ball” certainly disappears when Horatio exercises his “democratic rights” as a white man and becomes Clotel’s “purchaser” (Brown 88). Chakkalakal misplaces the democratic potential of the “Negro ball” by taking Brown’s words too literally. Rather than offering an opportunity for true marital equality between Horatio and Clotel, the ball actually offers Horatio the chance to perform his “democratic rights” as a white man by buying Clotel. Horatio’s position as a white man both permits him to own Clotel and is reinforced by his ownership of her. In other words, it is not Horatio’s “slave-marriage” to Clotel that offers democratic possibilities in this opening chapter, as Chakkalakal claims; rather, it is Horatio’s ability to enter into a master-slave relationship with a nonwhite woman that proves his access to democratic “rights” while simultaneously excluding the nonwhite woman from those rights and making her owned body the proof of them.

As long as Horatio maintains the master-slave dynamic of his relationship with Clotel, he too can escape the opprobrium of white society. Problems arise when he slips into a marriage-like dynamic with Clotel. Whereas Chakkalakal reads their marriage as a liberating and democratic moment in the text, I read it as the moment that Horatio begins to sacrifice his access to the democratic privileges available to white men. Horatio’s position and privilege as a white man define the relationship until the moment their relationship becomes “a marriage sanctioned by heaven” (100). Once Horatio and Clotel enter into an illicit marriage, Brown implies that the relationship is one of mutual enslavement. Rather than elevating Clotel to a status above slave, Brown suggests that Horatio’s relationship with Clotel lowers him to her social status. When Horatio “playfully asked how she could keep him if he wished to run away,” Clotel replies, “If the mutual love we have for each other, and the dictates of your own conscience do not cause you to remain my husband, and your affections fall from me, I would not, if I could, hold you by

a single fetter” (100). The lovers’ discussion reveals a number of things about their relationship. First, Horatio sees himself as a slave to his own mistress. Rather than worrying about his legal slave running away, Horatio reverses positions and questions Clotel as if she were his master and he her slave. Clotel’s response also carries the rhetoric of slavery when she talks of not holding Horatio “by a single fetter.” Clotel reminds him of the essential difference between them: he is legally free to leave whenever he chooses, but she is legally enslaved to him. In order for their spiritual marriage to have weight, Horatio must continually choose to forfeit his position as a free white man and “remain [Clotel’s] husband.”

Interestingly, though Brown borrows much of this passage from Child’s story, he significantly alters Clotel’s response. In “Quadroons,” Rosalie responds to the same line with, “Let the church that my mother loved sanction our union, and my own soul will be satisfied without the protection of the state. If your affections fall from me, I would not, if I could, hold you by a legal fetter” (Child 321). Brown rewrites the dialogue to eliminate Clotel’s dependence on the church and instead to emphasize the mutual love of husband and wife that binds Horatio and Clotel together. Importantly, Clotel claims Horatio as her spouse even as she confronts him with the reality that he can choose whether “to remain my husband.” Child refrains from using the words “husband” or “wife” to describe Edward and Rosalie at this moment. Horatio’s acceptance of his position as Clotel’s husband momentarily erases the master-slave relationship. Instead of elevating Clotel, the marriage lowers Horatio to the symbolic status of a “fettered” slave. The idea that Horatio is fettered implies not only that he is bound by his marriage to Clotel but also that he is bound down racially as the husband of a mixed-race woman.

Horatio’s choice to live as if married to Clotel creates unexpected social consequences. Horatio cannot fully access the privileges of white masculinity while remaining Clotel’s

husband. Finding himself increasingly excluded from white society, Horatio attempts to retain his position as a white man by being “often absent both day and night with his friends in the city” (Brown 101). On these expeditions, Clotel cannot accompany him because “the edicts of society had built up a wall of separation between the quadron and them” (101). Brown’s use of the pronoun “them” creates ambiguity here. On one level, “them” seems to indicate Horatio’s friends, but it may also include Horatio himself. This reading suggests that, when Horatio is with his friends, a “wall of separation,” a wall of whiteness, stands between him and Clotel. Race may appear to disappear within the confines of their secluded love nest, but when Horatio returns to white society to claim the rights of white masculinity, his whiteness becomes a barrier their love cannot surmount. Horatio cannot maintain his position as a white man with Clotel beside him; he must leave her behind in the liminal, secluded space where their extralegal marriage can exist. By treating Clotel more like an occasional mistress whom he visits when not carousing with his friends than a sincere wife to whom he returns each day, Horatio resists the surrender of his privilege. By implying that Horatio participates in the construction of this wall, Brown portrays the white suitor as not only subject to but complicit in the racial hierarchies that doom his mulatta lover.

As Horatio’s “ambition to become a statesman” gains “ascendancy over him,” he finds himself debarred from the exercise of his full political rights (Brown 101). To secure his position and gain access to these rights, Horatio must confirm his white masculinity by marrying a white woman. Hendrik Hartog elucidates the connection between marriage and access to white male democratic rights, explaining the “crucial place in the political culture of early nineteenth-century America” held by the idea of “marital unity.” “It was a fiction that supported the principle of wifely dependency and thereby helped establish the terms of republican male

citizenship” (110). Upon her marriage, a wife’s legal identity was absorbed into that of her husband. Her lack of legal identity “prevented her from entering into contracts and from keeping her own earnings [...] Wives and their labor, then, became a source of property that could not be alienated away from husbands” (Stockton 478). Clotel’s position as Horatio’s slave, a commodity whose person and labor can be bought and sold on a public market, makes her incapable of fulfilling the role of wifely dependency necessary to establish Horatio’s democratic rights. Moreover, Clotel’s lack of a legal identity as a slave leaves her nothing to offer Horatio in marriage, even if the marriage could be legalized. A fuller understanding of Hartog’s connection between marriage and citizenship rights must take into account the race of the persons in the marriage relationship. Though Horatio may own her labor, Clotel, unlike a white wife, can be sold at Horatio’s will. As a black woman and a slave, Clotel never can fulfill the role of inalienable property.

Enter Gertrude, the daughter of an influential political ally. Though “he still loved Clotel,” “thoughts of the great worldly advantages connected with a union” to Gertrude convince Horatio of the necessity of this marriage (101, 102). While recent studies of *Clotel* acknowledge and dissect the myriad performances of blackness present in Brown’s novel, their analyses often reify whiteness as a monolithic and static identity that innately belongs to white characters in the novel rather than equally interrogating its performative aspects. For instance, in “The Case against Whiteness in William Wells Brown’s *Clotel*,” Katie Frye explains the difference between Clotel and Gertrude, claiming, “While Clotel is able at best to borrow the trappings of whiteness, Gertrude owns them” (532). Clotel can slip into and out of whiteness by “borrow[ing] the trappings,” or performing a white identity, but Gertrude “owns” whiteness, meaning she need not perform it. Frye continues, Gertrude’s whiteness “has an authenticity that in turn confers

privilege on her husband, a man with burgeoning political aspirations” (532). Despite the claim that Gertrude “owns” the “trappings of whiteness,” Frye’s follow-up analysis of how the authenticity of Gertrude’s whiteness “confers privilege on her husband” implies that the authenticity of Horatio’s whiteness has to be confirmed through his performed marriage to a genuine white woman. In other words, Horatio must perform his whiteness through his choice of marriage partner.

Turning to Brown’s narration of Horatio and Gertrude’s relationship further highlights the extent to which Horatio performs whiteness in his pursuit of and marriage to Gertrude. Horatio’s initial attraction to Gertrude springs primarily from the perceived advantages such a marriage offers, primarily in confirming his proper performance of whiteness. Though “he would have given worlds to have disengaged himself from Gertrude” when confronted with the prospect of losing Clotel after his engagement to Gertrude, Horatio “had gone so far, that blame, disgrace, and duels with angry relatives would now attend any effort to obtain his freedom” (Brown 121). This passage suggests that Horatio has acted the role of a devoted suitor in his pursuit of Gertrude, having convinced her relatives of his sincerity. It further implies that his failure to follow through on his performance of ardor with marriage would result in punishment in the form of “blame, disgrace, and duels with angry relatives,” who would police Horatio’s poor performance of white masculinity in breaking the marriage contract. Keenly aware of his lack of “impassioned tenderness” for Gertrude, Horatio “was the more careful in his kindness,” performing the role of a loving husband to cover his deficiencies in genuine feeling (121). His proper performance of white masculinity “confers privilege” upon him, primarily by opening avenues for expression of his “burgeoning political aspirations.” Even as it insists upon ownership and authenticity of whiteness, Frye’s argument suggests the exact opposite: whiteness

is anything but a property to be owned for Horatio, who gains access to privilege only by the post-marital confirmation of his whiteness. John Ernest's idea that "One's social identity [...] is always contingent and is always in danger of being undermined as one's performance awaits verifying responses in the form of reciprocal performances in the field of social relations" helps us understand how marriage to a white woman functions for Horatio ("Reconstruction" 1111). Horatio claims a white identity by performing the choice of a white bride; his white identity is confirmed and rewarded when he marries Gertrude.

Read in this light, Gertrude's threats to leave Horatio upon learning of the existence of his "first wife" carry a greater significance to the novel than might initially appear. "Clotel's existence was now well known to Horatio's wife," the narrator explains, "and both her and her father demanded that the beautiful quadroon and her child should be sold and sent out of the state" (Brown 149). Though Horatio initially "turned a deaf ear" to this "proposition," "when he saw that his wife was about to return to her father's roof, he consented to leave the matter in the hands of his father-in-law" (149). Consequently, "Clotel was immediately sold to the slave-trader" (149). Horatio's actions at this moment seem inexplicable unless read through the lens of racial performance I have suggested. After all, the narrator makes clear that Horatio does not love Gertrude and that he continues to pine for Clotel even after his marriage to another woman. "Defeated in politics, forsaken in love by his wife," why would Horatio wish to prevent Gertrude from returning to her father's house (78)? Presumably, Gertrude's desire for a separation offers him the long-sought opportunity to disengage himself from her and return to his happy life with Clotel, yet Horatio sacrifices Clotel to retain Gertrude, an action that appears entirely nonsensical given his personal preferences. If, however, we consider that Gertrude lends credibility to Horatio's performance of white masculinity, we understand why he allows Clotel to be sold to

save the face of his legal marriage. Though “defeated in politics,” Horatio still benefits from the privileges conferred upon him by the “authenticity” of Gertrude’s whiteness, as Frye points out. Allowing his white wife to return to her parents so he can live with his slave mistress would mark Horatio for intense punishment from other white men, namely the loss of his property in whiteness.

In this reading of the novel, the white suitor factors more centrally than his tragic mulatta counterpart, who usually dominates critical readings of marriage in *Clotel*. My goal here is not to undermine the importance of the mixed-race slave woman but rather to expand the scholarly lens by considering the function of the white suitor.¹² Rather than assuming that the white suitor exists merely to heighten the “sexual vulnerability of a female light-skinned slave[, which] is essential to propel the plot forward,” I suggest that the tragic mulatta exists in this novel in part to allow Brown to bring white men under his microscope (Raimon 5). Understanding the role of the white suitor complements the scholarship on Brown’s tragic mulatta figures by encouraging critics to read her in relation to her white male counterpart. By examining this equally stereotyped and recurrent figure, we access Brown’s investigation of white male privilege and gain a greater appreciation of his decision to “imitate” white women’s sentimental marriage fiction. Symbolically donning “whiteface” and petticoats, Brown uses his literary disguise to subversively excavate the foundation of white male privilege. In doing so, he not only refutes the assumption that democratic privileges are somehow the innate property of white men, insisting instead that privilege is bequeathed upon the proper performance of whiteness by fulfilling the marriage contract but also paves the way for future African American authors, including Frank J.

¹² More work is needed on the role of white suitors in *Clotel*. This analysis only considers Horatio, but white suitors appear throughout the novel. Henry Morton and Volney Lupac deserve more critical attention, though they receive less narrative space. A host of other unnamed white suitors also make appearances. A more comprehensive study would take these characters into account.

Webb, to use the marriage plot as an innocuous genre in which to covertly discuss how access to democratic privilege can be gained or lost.

***“Their Conduct or Opinions Won’t Influence My Happiness Much”*: Marriage Rites in The Garies and Their Friends**

Written and published in London while he accompanied his wife, Mary, on an elocution tour, Frank J. Webb’s *The Garies and Their Friends* received little contemporary attention from American readers. The novel loosely builds on the bare-bones plot structure of the tragic mulatta novel: a wealthy planter buys a beautiful, near-white slave woman at an auction. He falls in love with her and comes to treat her more as a wife than as a mistress, leading to his social alienation from other whites.¹³ They produce children together, who, except for the “slightly mezzo-tinto expression of [their] eyes,” “would have passed [the “critically learned” in race matters] by without dreaming that a drop of negro blood coursed through [their] veins” (2, 3).¹⁴ The Garies have been leading a happy domestic life in relative seclusion from the outside world when the novel opens, but here the plot twists. When confronted with his wife’s fears of re-enslavement for herself and their children, Garie acts on her suggestion that they move away from the South. He chooses to relocate his family to Philadelphia, where interracial marriage has been legal since 1780 (Lemire 57). Ignoring opposition from the white community, Garie marries Emily and emancipates their children. Tragedy ensues when the untimely deaths of Garie and his wife at the

¹³ Jeffery Clymer notes that Emily experiences a “psychic dissonance” as the “black mistress of a slave plantation” that leaves her isolated both from the African American slaves around her and the white plantation mistresses nearby (29, 28). However, like other scholars who focus primarily on Emily, Clymer fails to recognize that Garie too lives with a type of psychic dissonance as the white plantation master legally married to a black woman and father to slave children. Unlike Emily’s isolation, which ends once she becomes part of Philadelphia’s free black community, Garie’s ostracism only intensifies over the course of the novel, finally ending with his murder at the hands of an angry mob of whites. The extent of Garie’s ostracism from white society has not been adequately addressed by scholars.

¹⁴ Following Brown, Webb borrows the phrase “mezzo-tinto” from Child, who uses it to describe the daughter of Horatio and Clotel. This phrasing suggests Webb’s familiarity with Brown and/or Child’s work.

hands of an angry white mob leave their children orphans. Webb's movement between this narrative and at least two others, African American life in Philadelphia and reactions of white Philadelphians to the Garies' interracial marriage, helps obscure his reliance on the basic structure of the tragic mulatta plot, but when stripped of its other embellishments and plot twists, the fundamental premise of Webb's story strongly resembles this genre.¹⁵

Webb uses the tragic mulatta plot as a premise for creating a white male protagonist whose misadventures in interracial marriage allow Webb to probe at the basis of white male "democratic rights." My reading of the novel builds on and departs from Elizabeth Stockton's argument that, "In *The Garies*, Webb depicts the ways that marriage can secure African American male self-possession;" rather than securing white male "self-possession," interracial marriage actually leads to the white suitor's divestment of physical goods as well as his property in whiteness in the novel (473). According to Stockton, "the ability to inhabit a status construction of marriage was essential to male self-possession and thus male citizenship" in the nineteenth century (475). She therefore claims that African American marriages in the novel function to "assert[] that African Americans possess more capacity for self-possession than white Americans" (475). In tandem with her argument, I suggest that the novel conversely explores the

¹⁵ Telling the Garies' story from the third person limited perspective of the white suitor instead of that of the mulatta also makes it difficult to identify this text as a descendant of the tragic mulatta tradition. Child and Brown both tell their stories primarily through the third person limited perspective of the mulatta, though they do occasionally fill in details of what the white suitor has been doing, thinking, or feeling. Webb's decision to follow Garie as the primary protagonist is, perhaps, his greatest contribution to the development of this genre. With the exception of Child's *A Romance of the Republic* in 1867, authors continued to take their cues from Webb. Margaret Bates and Thomas Dixon, Jr. both restrict narration to the white suitor's perspective. William Dean Howells jumps between Rhoda and Olney in a more omniscient narrative style, but his primary vehicle of narration is still Olney. Arguably, Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy* makes the permanent shift back to narrating through the perspective of the mulatta, a shift that would be maintained by later authors such as Robert Penn Warren in *Band of Angels*. However, even Harper employs a more omniscient style of narration that follows multiple characters, including the white suitor, before it ever introduces Iola. Approaching the tragic mulatta narrative from the perspective of the white suitor allows Webb to directly engage with questions of the marriage contract, whiteness, and privilege in a way that previous authors were unable to do.

undoing of the white suitor's "self-possession" and the loss of his "male citizenship" through interracial marriage. Through his speculative examination of the consequences of interracial marriage for white men, Webb uncovers the individual adherence to structures and performance of attitudes necessary to maintain this position of privilege.

Cheryl Harris's notion of whiteness as property provides a useful framework through which to read Webb's white suitor because it connects white identity to tangible benefits, but I also use *Garies* to illuminate problems with Harris's conception of this property. Harris speaks of hegemonic institutions only in terms of how they positively define aspects of whiteness. "The law's construction of whiteness," she explains, "defined and affirmed critical aspects of identity (who is white); of privilege (what benefits accrue to that status); and, of property (what *legal* entitlements arise from that status)" (1725). However accurate her argument is, it fails to acknowledge that if law can define identity, it can also define the appearance, actions, and beliefs that fit white identity; if law can determine who accesses status benefits, it also reserves the right to revoke that access; and if law can confer legal entitlements, then it can also deny these entitlements if it sees fit. White identity can be "constructed" through adherence to law and social opinion, but it can also be deconstructed through a disobedience to those laws and opinions. This idea runs contrary to Harris's claim that property in whiteness is "incapable of being transferred or alienated" (1732).¹⁶ If, however, the "common core of inalienability is the negation of the possibility of separation of an entitlement, right, or attribute from its holder," as Harris claims, then one of the major themes to emerge from Webb's novel is the suggestion that whiteness is a property that absolutely can be alienated (1731). My reading of *Garies* reveals that

¹⁶ Horatio's case demonstrates that whiteness is a fluid property that can be lost through poor performance and regained by performances that confirm white identity. Harris thinks of property in whiteness as a stable. Other scholars have considered how that property can be gained, but I emphasize the fluidity of this property in both directions. It can be gained and lost.

property in whiteness depends on the performance of a defined identity. By marrying white women, men confirm their white identities and gain access to the privileges and property benefits associated with whiteness, but by marrying nonwhite women, men jeopardize their white identities and, consequently, their access to privilege and property.

In *The Garies and Their Friends*, miscegenation law and social prejudice against interracial marriage become ways of negatively defining white identity, thereby leading to the alienation of Garie's property in whiteness. Between interracial marriage prohibitions and social disapproval of interracial marriage in the text, the marriage contract defines the edge of white privilege and has the power to revoke identity, privilege, and property. Initially, Southern marriage laws protect Garie's property in whiteness, even as he chooses to engage in a romantic relationship with his slave woman. In Georgia, Garie's property in whiteness depends upon the master-slave dynamic through which other whites read his relationship with Emily. Like *Clotel*, Emily "was placed upon the auction-block at Savannah," and like Horatio, "Mr. Garie had paid two thousand dollars for her, and was the envy of all the young bucks in the neighborhood who had competed with him at the sale" (2).¹⁷ Purchasing Emily with the intent of sexually abusing her does not threaten Garie's property in whiteness; in fact, the "envy" felt by other young white men only confirms his property in whiteness as well as his position as a leading white man "in the neighborhood." Garie's property in whiteness puts him in the position to buy Emily, but buying her also reaffirms that property.

Because he cannot legally marry Emily or pass property, either in whiteness or in tangible goods, on to her or his children, Southerners do not feel threatened by Garie's "family of

¹⁷ Webb's interesting choice of the word "bucks" resonates with derogatory epithets applied to black men on the auction block. Perhaps his application of the term to rich white men subtly suggests the bestial nature of men who buy women for pleasure.

peculiar construction” (1). Fellow planters deride Garie as a “soft-headed fool, led by the nose by a yaller wench” (59). Nevertheless, Garie continues to receive visits from neighboring planters who urge him act “like other men who happen to have half-white children—breed them up for the market and sell them” (59). These encouragements to profit from the sale of his own children serve as policings of Garie’s performance of whiteness, subtle reminders that, while they might cohabit and engage in sexual relations with slave women, white men should never let themselves be “led by the nose” by their African American mistresses. Accordingly, Garie’s visitors treat Emily not as his wife but as his illegitimate mistress and slave. Emily points out this dynamic, complaining that the “gentlemen who come to see you occasionally are polite to me, but, under existing circumstances, I feel that they cannot entertain for me the respect I think I deserve. I know they look down upon and despise me because I’m a coloured woman” (57). Emily may see herself as a wife, deserving of “respect,” but these “gentlemen” relegate Emily to the position of mistress, giving her no claims to her husband’s property or protection. Southern men view the relationship as the prerogative of white masculinity and continue to visit Garie because they understand his relationship as reinforcing white dominance through sex. Garie’s decision to treat Emily and the children as legitimate family may be “peculiar,” but neither is it entirely unacceptable for a man in his position. With no legal sanctions to enforce what they consider to be Garie’s poor judgments, other planters dismiss Garie’s peculiar arrangements because they are not undoable. Southern society accepts Garie as a white man because it has a framework (slavery) in which to understand his interracial relationship, a framework in which the institutions that uphold a property in whiteness are not threatened by informal interracial liaisons but reinforced by them.

Scholars have not yet noted the way in which Webb isolates his white suitor from other white characters as the plot progresses. Instead, many critics have explored Emily's isolation in the South as motivation for the action of the novel. Jeffery Clymer explains her situation best when he points out that Emily's position as the "black mistress of a slave plantation" leaves her experiencing a "psychic dissonance" that isolates her both from the African American slaves around her and the white plantation mistresses nearby (28, 29). Indeed, Emily bemoans her lonely existence on the plantation, exclaiming, "Oh, how I have longed for friends! [...] The white ladies of the neighbourhood will not associate with me, although I am better educated" (57). Though she mentions some "cultivated coloured acquaintances from Savannah" with whom she occasionally visits, Emily never considers as friends the enslaved men and women who serve her family. Educated and elevated beyond the social level of slaves yet barred by race from association with white women of her class, Emily finds herself in an awkward in between position that can only be alleviated by finding friends of her race and class. Emily's isolation ends once she becomes part of Philadelphia's free black community, but Garie's ostracism only intensifies with the move north.

Garie contemplates the potential social consequences of moving north to marry his slave mistress, including social isolation, but he fails to comprehend the extent to which his threat to the privileges conveyed by a property in whiteness will affect his own property in whiteness. When Garie's Uncle John confronts him with the fact that "You won't be able to sustain your old connections with your Northern friends," Garie simply responds, "If my old friends choose to turn their backs on me because my wife happens to belong to an oppressed race, that is not my fault [...] [T]heir conduct or opinions won't influence my happiness much" (100). Garie recognizes isolation as a possible side effect of his interracial marriage but passes it off as a

minor problem. He calculates his losses only in terms of companionship, “conduct,” and “opinions.” At no point does he consider that his marriage will come at the cost of his property in whiteness. Like current scholars of the novel, Garie fails to see his isolation as a sign that he is losing his white identity. His decision to move north is, in fact, influenced by his belief that he will be able to exercise his white privilege more fully in a state where interracial marriage is legal.

Garie makes certain assumptions about the rights that should be accessible to him as a white man living in the North. His explicit motives for relocating include: a desire to marry the partner of his choice; a “desire that [his children] might be where they could enjoy the advantages of schools;” and a desire “to give [Emily] a lawful claim to what [she has] already won by [her] faithfulness and devotion” (59, 134).¹⁸ In other words, Garie plans to employ his property in whiteness to gain access to status benefits and legal entitlements that will ensure the quality of life he desires for his nonwhite wife and children. Because he intends to use his democratic rights as a white man for the benefit of nonwhites, Garie’s assertion of a property in whiteness quickly becomes problematic for Philadelphians, especially poor whites who feel most threatened by this infringement on the marginal benefits they receive for supporting white supremacy. In the absence of slavery both as a legal and social means of defining the relationship between Garie and Emily, Northerners have no choice but to confront the reality of interracial

¹⁸ Marriage to the partner of his choice, as Garie well realizes, depends on the laws of the state. However, the great tragedy of the novel is that he does not seem to realize that legal sanctions of interracial marriage in Philadelphia do not equate to social sanctions. He is consequently taken aback when the first minister he hires refuses to marry him to Emily because “on no consideration could I be induced to assist in the union of a white man or woman with a person who had the slightest infusion of African blood in their veins” (137). Marriage to someone of the same race is one of the demarcated aspects of the marriage contract under fire in *Garies*; marriage to someone of the opposite gender is one of the assumed aspects of the marriage contract that does not come under speculation in this text. Considering the debates surrounding homosexual marriage today reveals how the marriage contract is being redefined in order to give access to privilege. The ruling in favor of gay marriage strikes a blow against the power of the marriage contract, but given the difficulty associated with passing and enforcing the Supreme Court ruling, we can see it still retains a great deal of power to grant and revoke privilege in current culture.

marriage and the potential privileges it confers on nonwhites. “The virtuous dignity of the Northerner,” the narrator explains, “would be shocked, not so much at his having children by a woman of colour, but by his living with her in the midst of them, and acknowledging her as his wife” (97). This shock does not spring from the possibility of illicit sexual encounters that produce partially white offspring but from legitimate sexual encounters that produce partially white offspring who can claim their father’s property. White Philadelphians understand the relationship as a violation of the marriage contract, one that threatens to offer white identity, privilege, and property to nonwhite heirs, thereby destroying white privilege.

Led primarily by Garie’s neighbor and, as is later revealed, long-lost cousin George Stevens, the white community acts swiftly to revoke Garie’s property in whiteness after news spreads of his defiance of the marriage contract. Over the course of a few chapters, Garie loses his status benefits, followed by his legal entitlements, and finally his very identity as a white man. The first sign of trouble appears when Garie’s children, Clary and little Em, are turned away from school when Mrs. Stevens exposes their racial ancestry to the other parents. Faced with the loss of patronage from a group of prominent parents, Mrs. Jordan, the schoolteacher, tearfully dismisses Clary and Em from the school with a letter to their father explaining the circumstances. Despite Mrs. Jordan’s protestations that Garie “is a Southerner, a thorough gentleman in his manners; and, if ever a man was white, I am sure he is,” Mrs. Stevens demands the Garie children’s expulsion on the grounds that “they are [...] as much niggers as the blackest, and have no more right to associate with white children than if they were black as ink” (157). Clary and Em’s expulsion marks the initial backlash of the white community against Garie’s attempt to exercise his white privilege for the benefit of his nonwhite dependents. The act may seem to spring from George Stevens’s vindictive desire to punish Garie for bringing mixed-race

people into a white neighborhood, but Stevens's character represents the tendency of white society to police white male access to democratic rights through the marriage contract. That Garie would choose not only to marry a mixed-race woman but to buy a house in a white neighborhood and send his children to a white school marks him as a threatening white man who needs to be taught the price and the limit of his privilege. Clary and Em's dismissal comes as a warning to Garie that he ought not to attempt to give his children access to such privileges when they cannot claim a property in whiteness of their own.

Denied access to status benefits such as moving in upper class white circles, engaging in politics, and having his children attend white schools, Garie clings to the belief that his property in whiteness at least allows him to determine how his physical property will be disposed of after his death. Through a twist in the plot, Stevens learns not only that he and Garie are first cousins but that, if he can manage Garie's murder and prove his own relation, he can displace the "little darkies of [Garie's who] will inherit" his fortune otherwise (167). According to Clymer, "we should understand [Stevens] as the violent flip side of Uncle John. Just as John could not stomach the idea that Clarence intended to legalize his relationship with Emily, Stevens's selfish violence has the side effect of keeping the Garie family money white" (33). John's gentle remonstrations become violent policings through Stevens, but both characters serve to redefine the family as a white unit for Garie, despite his best efforts to make it otherwise. Staging a plan that will both terrorize Philadelphia's African American community and lead to Garie's "accidental" death, Stevens uses the fact of Garie's interracial marriage to incite mob violence against Garie that will end in his murder.

In planning the mob action, Stevens importantly conspires with McCloskey, a poor Irishman who will lead the attack on Garie's home. Garie poses a particularly intense threat to

working-class Irish figures in the novel who, as Noel Ignatiev explains, are still working to establish their property in whiteness.¹⁹ Becoming white meant refusing to mingle with African Americans, excluding them from Irish neighborhoods and Irish-dominated occupations, and perpetrating mob violence against black communities when necessary to enforce this separation (Ignatiev 112). By adopting and performing the values of whiteness, the Irish not only earned a white identity but became a pillar of white supremacy in both the antebellum and postbellum United States. Understanding the position of the Irish at this historical moment helps readers understand that McCloskey's own position as a white man depends on his adherence to structures created by other established white men, in this case Stevens. When McCloskey balks at the idea of committing cold-blooded murder simply because Stevens commands it, Stevens reminds him, "Do as I require, and I'll promote your interest in every possible way, and protect you, but waver, or hold back, and I'll hang you as unhesitatingly as if you were a dog" (Webb 178). Stevens's threat almost directly points to his policing of access to property in whiteness: if McCloskey acts in the interest of white men, he may rise to become one of them; if not, he will be treated as a nonwhite Irish "dog." Especially in moments when he deems he can confer or revoke a property in whiteness upon those who obey or disobey the rules he enforces, Stevens acts less as a character and more as a metaphor for the sociopolitical structures of whiteness in the novel. The precariousness of McCloskey's own claim to whiteness leaves him prey to the brutal demands of Stevens, who stands in for the white society that requires McCloskey to prove

¹⁹ In *How the Irish Became White*, Ignatiev explores the position of the Irish as a buffer group between upper-class white Philadelphians and free blacks. Though they appeared white, Irish immigrants often found themselves lumped together with African Americans, labeled white negroes or "smoked Irish" by white Americans (Ignatiev 41). Ignatiev makes clear that, although white skin made the Irish eligible to be considered white, skin color alone did not guarantee their ability to identify as white or claim the benefits of such an identity; they had to earn their whiteness (59).

his own dedication to white supremacy by murdering Garie for his transgression of the marriage contract.

McCloskey reveals the process by which a property in whiteness can be gained by enforcing the marriage contract just as Garie demonstrates how that property can be alienated by violating the contract. To help sway McCloskey to do his bidding, Stevens tells him that Garie “lives with a nigger woman—and, what is more, he is married to her!” (179). Though McCloskey exclaims, “Married to a nigger,” he immediately follows it up with his own processing of the problem: “it’s a quare taste the animal has—but you’re not aafter killing him for that” (180). Though he correctly divines that Stevens has ulterior motives of his own for having Garie murdered, i.e., laying claim to Garie’s fortune, McCloskey fails to realize that killing Garie to punish him for being “married to a nigger” or to divest his mixed-race children of their inheritance amounts to the same underlying motive: a desire to police access to white privilege by enforcing the marriage contract. McCloskey becomes Stevens’s protégé in whiteness, for he must be taught that marriage to a “nigger woman” amounts to more than “quare taste;” it presents a threat to the entire structure upon which whiteness as property guarantees rights.²⁰

Counter to Anna Engle’s claim that “Stevens’s ignominious associations with the Irish mob are based not so much on a shared whiteness as on a shared sense of class status stemming from Stevens’s working class roots,” I argue that, though obviously separated by class, Stevens and McCloskey finally unite around the protection of the privileges that accompany a property in

²⁰ Webb’s decision to have McCloskey use the word “taste” to describe Garie’s marital preferences is particularly interesting in light of Lemire’s argument that “Taste was an operative word in the press during the New York City riots [of the 1830s] whenever the issue of amalgamation was addressed. Good taste was the barrier thought to normally prevent inter-mixing” (79). For McCloskey to truly become white, he must be educated as to what constitutes “good taste” as far as marital and sexual preferences go. “Quare taste” must be corrected through punishment, not simply dismissed.

whiteness maintained through the marriage contract (158). While Stevens's father is described as a "greasy mechanic," his mother turns out to be Garie's aunt, a Southern aristocrat (102). Stevens makes clear throughout the novel that he identifies with these aristocratic roots, not his working-class roots, and he certainly never reveals his class background to his henchmen. At no point does Webb give the sense that Stevens and McCloskey bond over their shared class background, as Engle argues. In fact, the text indicates just the opposite: throughout the novel, Stevens exercises his class privilege as the educated lawyer who successfully defended McCloskey in a murder case to blackmail McCloskey into doing his bidding. However, united against the threat Garie poses to their democratic rights as white men, Stevens and McCloskey become the means of enforcing the judgment of sociopolitical systems that condemn Garie for marrying a black woman. McCloskey's desire to assert and maintain a white identity that, while still leaving him at the bottom of the class structure, at least elevates him to higher racial status, plays a significant part in his decision to carry out Stevens's plan. The interaction between Stevens and McCloskey proves that white identity is open to European foreigners who choose to maintain the ideology of white supremacy by upholding the marriage contract. However, access to white identity is closed to men like Garie, who choose not to obey the rules. Most of McCloskey's rioters are poor whites and Irishmen, suggesting that this group of people stand to gain or lose the most through the enforcement of racial hierarchies.²¹

²¹ Brown bases his narrative of the mob attack upon a series of race riots that occurred in Philadelphia between 1834 and 1842, which were, indeed, led mostly by the Irish working class (Ignatiev 139). In the initial 1834 riot, whites allegedly avenged themselves against a rivaling black fire company who they claimed had stolen equipment from the white fire company. Over a two-day period, rioters attacked the homes of middle- and upper-class African Americans. Though working-class whites led the riots, Robert Levine notes the complicity of wealthy whites in these riots. Clearly having obtained advanced knowledge of the seemingly spontaneous mob violence, wealthy whites living in neighborhoods under attack turned off their lights as a signal to the mob that these were white homes. No damage was done to these residences (Levine 358). An 1838 riot broke out after rumors spread that the newly opened Pennsylvania Hall, built by the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, promoted mixing between whites and blacks within its walls. Wealthy white men set fire to the building, and the fire companies refused to put it out

In the ensuing attack on his home, Garie confronts, for the first and last time, the extent to which he has alienated his property in whiteness. Unaware of Stevens's plans to divest his children of their inheritance, Garie also never responds to his children's expulsion from school, so readers can only speculate as to how aware Garie is of what he has lost in terms of democratic rights. McCloskey leads a mob assault on the Garies' home according to plan. Replicating his mentor's tactics, McCloskey has evidently used Garie's violation of the marriage contract to enflame the mob, as it shouts, "down with the Amalgamationist! give them tar and feathers!" (221).²² Still relying on his property in whiteness, Garie assumes a legal right to protect himself, his family, and his property, declaring to the mob, "I warn you [...] against any attempt at violence upon my person, family, or property. I forbid you to advance another foot upon the premises" (221). As the mob's blatant indifference to his warning implies, in disregarding the marriage contract, Garie has sacrificed his right to protect his person and property. The mob "ransacked the house, breaking all they could not carry off," and in the process, "a pistol was discharged close to [Garie's] head and he fell forward on the entry floor lifeless" (223). Rendered powerless to protect himself, his dependents, or his property, Garie learns too late the very real consequences of violating the marriage contract and alienating his intangible property in whiteness.

(Levine 358). Webb also draws from the events of an 1842 riot, sparked by a temperance march organized by Philadelphia's free black community. Infuriated working-class whites attacked the procession, inspired, as Levine explains, by their jealousy of the black middle and upper class. The violence escalated as the mob began to destroy black homes and churches (Levine 358-359).

Though these riots were "motivated more by class than by race" according to Engle, it is important to note that the envy of the poor whites was provoked not merely by the class position of their African American targets but by their racial position as well (158). With the cooperation between lower- and upper-class whites, the Philadelphia riots served to reinforce race dominance over class dominance, reminding middle- and upper-class African Americans that their superior class position did not triumph over their inferior racial position.

²² Elise Lemire notes that amalgamation fears regularly prompted white violence throughout the 1830s. "So powerful was this rhetoric" of potential amalgamation, she explains, "that as many as 165 anti-abolitionist riots broke out in the North over the course of the decade" (55).

The final sign of Garie's divestment of his property in whiteness comes when his identity as a white man is permanently effaced in death. When Garie's lawyer suggests burying the husband and wife in a white cemetery, Garie's black friends remind him, "they won't even permit a coloured person to walk through the ground, much less to be buried there" (233). As in life, if Garie and Emily would lie together in death, then Garie must sacrifice his property in whiteness. The black community buries Garie and his wife "in the graveyard of the coloured Episcopal church," where all remembrance of Garie's white identity is finally and eternally effaced (234). The white suitor becomes a tragic figure in his own right when he faces the persecution of whites protecting their own property in whiteness. However, Webb's purpose is not merely to portray the white man as a tragic figure; he strategically does so to expose the structures as well as the identity performances that make a property in whiteness possible. Garie becomes the focal point of white rage in the novel because he threatens these structures by failing to perform his white identity by marrying a white woman. By marking out the transgressive white man for punishment, Webb reveals how the national system of white supremacy not only grants democratic rights to obedient men like McCloskey but also punishes nonconformists like Garie by revoking their rights. *Garies* suggests, then, that a property in whiteness is based not solely on birth but also on performing according to the rules set forth by the sociopolitical structures that proclaim white superiority.²³

²³ Heather Dalmage's concept of "rebound racism" offers another possible lens through which to read Garie's tragedy. She explains the term thusly: "When whites enter an interracial relationship they experience racism, albeit indirectly. In these cases racism is directed at the black partner but also affects the white partner [...] The effect can be financial, emotional, or physical. While the white partner is not the intended victim, she or he is in a relationship with someone who is" (63). Garie's situation could be read simply as an experience of rebound racism, with Emily as the primary target of white hatred. This reading might yield useful results, but it is important to remember that characters in the novel specifically target Garie as the subject of their plotting and their violence, not Emily. Though a useful theory, rebound racism may obscure the ways that whites in interracial relationships are deliberately punished by other whites.

Through Garie's tragic story, Webb's novel challenges the notion that all white men have an innate and inalienable property in whiteness that entitles them to legal and social rights. Garie may be legally white, but this legal identity does not grant him permanent access to the democratic rights of white men. His disobedience to one of the foremost rules of white masculinity, legal marriage to a white woman, marks him out to other white men as unfit to have these rights. At the heart of a property in whiteness, then, lies not heritage, biology, or skin color, but a physical whiteness confirmed by performance of social norms that perpetuate the privilege that property bestows. Webb's novel suggests that white identity rests on more than physical difference. Garie's body unmistakably marks him as white, yet Webb demonstrates that physical appearance is not enough to ensure Garie's white identity or to protect him from the violent reactions of others who claim a certain kind of white identity. Rather, white identity consists of a set of ideologies, attitudes, and behaviors that those who choose to be identified socially as white must perform. Property in whiteness relies on culture as much as phenotype. The marriage contract proved to be a means by which elite whites rewarded adherence to structures of control while policing and punishing deviations. By predicating access to rights upon behavior more so than biology, white elites ensured that even those persons who were not legally white—including the Irish and future ethnically non-white immigrants—but chose to pass as white would be invested in repeating behaviors that supported white supremacy, such as marrying and transmitting property only to other whites.²⁴ This method also ensured that phenotypically white men, like Garie, who chose not to play by the rules, could not threaten the structures set in place.

²⁴ Referring to a number of antebellum race trials in which the individual's whiteness was under dispute, Teresa Zackodnik explains that questions of race were often settled by reputation. "[C]onsidering reputation alongside genealogy in the same case," she notes, "could result in a legal definition of race as reputation overriding 'scientific' notions of race (degree of blood) and its expression (visible mixture) [...]. [J]udges and juries repeatedly considered the performance of whiteness at least as if not more important than the verification of whiteness through genealogy" (30).

White Americans thereby ensured the continuance of narratives of white supremacy that made a property in whiteness possible.

Finally, Webb suggests that the Garies' tale did not have to end in tragedy, even if it did have to end in some sort of alienation. In the brief story of an unnamed white suitor, Webb offers alienation of citizenship as a substitute for the white suitor's alienation of whiteness. Because property in whiteness is dependent on the laws of the nation, the solution to alienating whiteness becomes leaving the United States for a country where the laws do not promote whiteness as property. Toward the end of the novel, Webb introduces a brief news clipping that tells the story of "the Hon.— —, who represents a district of [New Orleans] in the State legislature" until he is "united to the Quarteroon daughter of the late Gustave Almont" (331). The couple "purpose going to France to reside,—a sensible determination; as, after such a *mésalliance*, the honourable gentleman can no longer expect to retain his former social position in our midst" (331). Bereft of his "former social position," and likely his political position as well, this unnamed gentleman, the omission of whose name both serves to protect and to efface his identity, recognizes something Garie tragically does not: expatriation is the only "sensible" option for a white man who desires to marry a mixed-race woman. Webb's adaptation of tragic mulatta tropes, most importantly the white suitor, enables him to directly attack the marriage contract as the basis of white male democratic rights. He thereby demonstrates that these rights are not the result of innate superiority but of performing white identity and having that performance verified through marriage to a white woman. In the hands of postbellum white writers, the plight of the white suitor would become a warning to those men who mistakenly or openly defied the marriage contract rather than an exposure and critique of how the marriage contract turned democratic rights into regulated privileges.

Chapter 3

“The Perfection of the *Individual* is the Sure Way to Regenerate the *Mass*”:
Reconstructing White Masculinity in *A Romance of the Republic*

The Civil War and emancipation temporarily destabilized the racial structures made possible in large part by slavery, creating a moment in which to imagine an alternative to antebellum white supremacy. As the nation began the process of reunion, questions arose surrounding the meaning of reunion. Which relationships—North-South or black-white—were most in need of “reconstruction” in a nation that had just engaged in a sectional conflict over the enslavement of African Americans? Writers turned to the marriage plot to puzzle out such questions and offer potential resolutions. Though many contemporary novelists portrayed reunion as a marriage between Northern and Southern whites, rebuilt upon the principles of white privilege, Lydia Maria Child once again rushed into the conversation with a radical reconceptualization of the topic of the day.¹ In her 1867 novel, *A Romance of the Republic*, Child rewrote the meaning of reunion as cross-racial rather than cross-sectional reconciliation through her dual interracial marriage plots. As William Andrews notes, African American authors like Frederick Douglass and Elizabeth Keckley were also engaging in this process of defining reunion as cross-racial through the “emotionally charged reunions between the protagonists of postbellum slave narratives and their ex-masters or mistresses” (5). To these narratives of black-white reunion, Child joined her voice, adding a significant twist to these African American-penned autobiographies that feature a “former slave who takes initiative to return to the South

¹ For an example of a novel that privileges the narrative of North-South reunion while subordinating African American concerns, see John Williams DeForest’s *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion from Secession to Loyalty*, published the same year as Child’s *Romance*.

and reunite with the former mistress and master” (Andrews 12). Child’s novel engages in two major projects that at first join with the goals of these African-American texts but finally diverge from them: first, it redefines reunion as cross-racial, and second, it prompts readers to reconsider who and what need to be reconstructed in the postbellum period and how. While redefining reunion is certainly her overarching goal in the novel, Child also aims to shape the project of national Reconstruction by forcing her audience to reconsider who should be responsible for reconciliation—wronged, relatively powerless ex-slaves or powerful white men with access to resources. Rather than assuming that African Americans are incapable of leading racial reunion, Child expresses a sense of white guilt that leads her to make reunion the responsibility of the white Northern man. Like Brown and Webb, Child uses the intermarriage plot device to explore white male rights and responsibilities, but in the uncertainty of the postwar moment, she also uses this device to rewrite those rights and responsibilities as part of her Reconstruction plan.

Throughout her career as a literary activist, Child maintained that, as she said in a letter to friend Francis Shaw, “[T]he perfection of the *individual* is the sure way to regenerate the *mass*” (Meltzer and Holland 161). Not surprisingly, then, Child offers a postwar vision of Reconstruction that hinges upon changed individual attitudes rather than national legislative actions. Writing once again to Shaw, she reveals the attitude she intends to alter with *Romance*: “I wanted to do something to undermine *prejudice*; and there is such a passion for novels, that more can be done in that way, than by the ablest arguments, and the most serious exhortations” (qtd. in Karcher, *First Woman* 505). *A Romance of the Republic* consequently ties together Child’s literary activism with her personal philosophy that social and political changes, in this case the defeat of “prejudice,” could best be reached through the actions of converted individuals. The novel applies this philosophy to the project of national Reconstruction primarily

through the understudied white male character, Alfred King, and his marriage to the mixed-race female protagonist, Rosa Royal. I argue in this chapter that King most fully represents Child's prototype for the "perfect[ed]" individual capable of "regenerat[ing] the mass." Seen from King's perspective, the novel breaks easily into two halves: the individual's reconstruction, in which King must confront and overcome his own prejudices to marry Rosa, and the "mass" reconstruction, in which King preaches individual conversion and leads the project of racial reunion. In the first half of the novel, Child creates a hero capable of enacting the kind of reconstruction she believes necessary to the project of racial reconciliation; in the second half of the novel, she shows her hero in action.

Scholars have long acknowledged that Child attempts to depict racial reunion through the Kings' interracial marriage plot in *Romance*, but because they generally agree that it is the mixed-race female protagonist rather than the white male suitor whom Child works to convert in the novel, they conclude that Child's Reconstruction vision suffers from a "failure of nerve—and of imagination—reflected in the novel's principle marriage plot" (Karcher 523). The novel begins promisingly; though it follows the typical tragic mulatta plot—the white father's death, the impending sale of the mixed-race daughters on the auction block, their rescue by the white suitor, and the white suitor's betrayal of his enslaved lover—the novel turns unexpectedly when Rosa escapes the clutches of her dissipated master/lover and establishes herself as a self-supporting woman rather than dying in shame. However, according to the scholarly community, the radical potential of this narrative all but disappears when, after her marriage to King, Rosa willingly relinquishes her mixed-race identity to claim a white one and chooses not to reveal to their children the truth of her heritage. Criticizing the novel's assimilationist politics, the erasure of black identity, and the exclusion of darker-skinned African Americans from the national

family picture, Jean Fagan Yellin concludes, “Although proposing miscegenation as the solution to the American race problem, *A Romance of the Republic* colors the multiracial American family not from white to black, but only from white to beige” (75). Yellin suggests that Child’s Reconstruction plan flops because it tries to whiten black America by offering passing as an option rather than broadening the color spectrum to include darker African Americans. Similarly, citing the erasure of Rosa’s black ancestry, Carolyn Karcher states that “Child’s allegiance to an ideal of assimilation that remained white-dominated prevented her from imagining satisfactory alternatives to the social order she had so trenchantly anatomized” (527). Child’s failure, according to Karcher, is her inability to reimagine the social order as anything other than white-male headed.

Other critiques draw the connection between the failure of Child’s race politics as well as her gender politics in the second half of the novel. On both counts, scholars claim, Rosa is forced to change for her union with King to succeed. Aside from choosing to identify as white, Rosa relinquishes a budding opera career to conform to true womanhood standards. Once an independent, mixed-race woman, Rosa becomes a financially and emotionally dependent white woman. Her husband, meanwhile, proceeds in Rosa’s name to resolve the major tensions that remain in the novel. Cassandra Jackson cites this conclusion as evidence of the “paternalistic arrangement that Child imagines between whites and African Americans” as well as men and women (58). Rather than a “marriage of equals,” she argues that Child imagines “a condescending relationship in which one party is forever responsible for the other” (58). Consequently, Rosa must be reconstructed to be sufficiently dependent, both in terms of race and gender, by the novel’s end. Child’s intermarriage solution does not do away with white male privilege, as these scholars and many others have aptly demonstrated. Her paternalistic resolution

seems to acquiesce troublingly to both white and masculine superiority, collapsing the egalitarian, meritocratic space she creates for African Americans and women in the first half of the novel. However, as I will argue, it is this “trenchantly anatomized” “social order” that Child uses to reach her Reconstruction goals. Instead of rewriting the patriarchal structure, Child rewrites the patriarchs, a deliberate strategy on her part rather than a “failure of nerve.” This strategy, while not radical, nonetheless offers what Child believes to be the most realistic pathway to necessary social progress.

Surprisingly little scholarship focuses on Rosa’s dual-husband plot or Alfred King’s role in bringing about Child’s racially reconstructed nation. Attempting to recuperate aspects of the novel’s Reconstruction politics, other scholars shift focus away from the marriage plot entirely. The adoption plot that develops around Rosa’s sister Flora and her benevolent white “mother,” Lila Delano, draws the majority of critical attention when it comes to discussions of Child’s reconstruction goals in *Romance*.² For instance, Alice Rutkowski argues that, “Rather than a national, legislative solution to slavery and racism, Child offers an individual and emotional one: Black characters, adopted and married, literally become part of American families.” (87). Though she draws the parallel between Flora’s adoption plot and Rosa’s marriage plot as dual means of incorporating African Americans into the national family, Rutkowski never develops this parallel but instead dwells on Lila and Flora’s mother-daughter relationship as the primary example of expanding the national family. Karcher similarly privileges the adoption plot, stating, “Of the characters who set new directions for the nation, the most interesting is Lila Delano,”

² After being propositioned by Rosa’s lover, Flora escapes from his plantation and is taken in by a widowed, white Bostonian, Lila Delano. Upon hearing of Flora’s sexual harassment, Lila adopts her as a legal daughter and whisks her away to Europe before eventually settling in Boston. By financially backing a young clerk interested in Flora, Lila eventually makes it possible for Flora to marry her own white suitor. Rosa remains unaware of her sister’s plight and her need to escape. She consequently believes Flora to be dead when she does not return to their cottage home. The sisters are reunited in Boston in the second half of the novel.

who, despite the mockery of her friends, turns abolitionist after befriending Flora (519). Beyond Lila's political realignment, Karcher claims, "The cultural transformation Mrs. Delano undergoes is even more significant, heralding the results Child hoped would ensue from an intermingling of races, classes, and cultures," as Lila "overcomes her upper-class notions of 'propriety'" to make space in her life for the spirited Flora (520). Dana Nelson also takes up this thread when she names Lila the "model for white America under Reconstruction" in the novel, claiming that Lila "provides an example of moral progress expressed through sympathetic social action that suggests the means by which 'white' Americans could write a better record" (Nelson xiv). Jeffery Clymer touches only lightly on the intermarriage plot, instead shifting attention away from Child's "protocols of racial identity" and onto her "strategizing to move white wealth to American blacks" through adoptive relationships that restructure the American family (106). He argues that Flora's adoption by Lila creates "a new family that provides a more solid right to white wealth for the legally black young girl" (109). For Clymer, adoption functions as a means of imagining the redistribution of wealth to nonwhites, one of the primary goals of radical Reconstruction. This reading might easily be expanded to include the King marriage, but Clymer touches only lightly on King's role in the novel. At best, this overview of scholarship suggests that, where the novel succeeds as a model of Reconstruction, it succeeds because of Lila Delano. However, these analyses focus primarily on marriage's effects on Rosa or the changes wrought in Lila's character as a result of her adoption of Rosa's mixed-race sister. Each of these analyses shares a blind spot for Alfred King. By failing to consider King's role in the novel, scholars have overlooked an important aspect of Child's Reconstruction plans in *Romance*.

What all of these critiques miss by ignoring or sidestepping Alfred King is the way that Child rewrites postwar white masculinity as a means of achieving Reconstruction and reunion.

King provides a more compelling “model for white America under Reconstruction” than Lila Delano because it is primarily through King that Child refashions the white American. Through King’s evolution from ambivalent slavery apologist to active abolitionist to husband of a mixed-race wife and finally to active redistributor of white wealth, Child creates a new man, and a new masculinity, capable of leading the nation into a future of racial equality. King’s transformation requires not only that he begin to see race and slavery with new eyes but that he begin to see gender from a new perspective. In the first half of the novel, Child remakes him into a man capable of valuing the nontraditional, mixed-race woman and willing to make her a legitimate wife and mother. To throw King’s process of evolution into higher relief, Child creates as a static foil the dissipated Southerner, Gerald Fitzgerald. In contrast to King, Fitzgerald never grows in his views on race and femininity, despite changing circumstances and great detriment to his own family. A comparison of the two suitors’ treatment of Rosa as wife reveals the reconstruction Child envisions for white masculinity through King in the first half of the novel. Though the expansion of King’s role in the second half of the novel does diminish Rosa’s independence and agency, it also suggests the ways in which reconstructed white men might lead the project of national Reconstruction. By examining the wide-reaching effects of King’s “sympathetic action,” driven by his marriage to Rosa, I uncover Child’s vision of an egalitarian meritocracy characterized by defeated prejudices, racial uplift, and Americans “who might celebrate hybridity” that she implies will arise in future generations as a result of the efforts made by men like King (Nelson xiv, Jackson 49). While her solution to the elimination of racial prejudice in the post-emancipation period smacks of paternalism, a fact that no alternative reading can deny, Child may have considered this white-male-headed project of Reconstruction a short-term

solution to socially created disadvantages that resulted in temporary differences between the races rather than a long-term solution to permanent differences between the races.

“What is it to Me if He Marries Her or Not?”

Child dedicates the first half of the novel to rehearsing what by now had become a familiar tale to her readers: beautiful, innocent slave women left unprotected by negligent fathers, sold to lascivious slaveholders, and exploited by white male privilege. However, in the first few pages of *Romance*, Child deviates from her ready-made plot by adding Northern male protagonists, a decision that makes her novel an explicit address to both halves of the divided nation in need of Reconstruction. Like their predecessor, Rosalie, in “The Quadroons,” Rosa and Flora are daughters of a wealthy New Orleans merchant, Alfred Royal, and his mixed-race slave mistress, deceased at the novel’s beginning. Surrounded by every luxury, the girls know neither their mother’s race nor the reality of their parents’ relation to each other but lead a comfortable and secluded existence. Much like in her previous fiction, Child creates a careless father whose failure to emancipate his wife or his daughters sets the drama in motion, yet Royal differs from Child’s previous neglectful patriarchs in that he is a native New Englander. As Karcher explains, Royal’s Boston origin proves to be an important detail in Child’s effort to remind readers of “the key role Yankee slave traders played in establishing the foundations of the South’s plantation economy,” and in her subsequent attempts to reconstruct the nation’s white men, specifically its Northern white men, who she see as responsible for leading racial reconciliation (514). I build on Karcher’s claim by arguing that, in Child’s novel, the antebellum Northern patriarch, seduced by slavery’s charms, holds as much responsibility for the trials his mixed-race daughters endure under slavery as the profligate Southern oppressor does. Child’s revised version of the intermarriage plot implicates both sections in the sins of slavery and sexual exploitation.

While the novel primarily focuses on Rosa and Flora's twinned plot lines, the narrative also tracks Alfred King's evolution from prejudiced abolitionist to egalitarian husband of a mixed-race woman, a transformation that has been less studied than either Rosa or Flora's plots. Early in the novel, King confronts the alternative lifestyle offered him by his position as a white man in the South. Despite its cheerful overtones, menacing implications underpin the novel's opening scene, in which Royal invites the visiting King home, claiming, "there was nothing better worth seeing [in New Orleans] than my daughters" (Child 1). Royal entertains King "royally," commanding his daughters to perform. "I wanted my friend to see you dance," he tells Flora, adding, "Select one of your prettiest [...] and Rosabella will play it" (8). Royal's daughters become the "little plaything[s]" of their father's friend as they perform for his pleasure (Child 6). The novel suggests the ease with which well-intentioned Northerners, like Royal and King, slip into a dangerous complacency about slavery and their own white male privilege, a complacency that enables them to reduce these beautiful girls to "plaything[s]." "Even the stalwart Alfred King," Dana Nelson notes, "who is depicted as the model of male self-control, is seduced by this panorama of male privilege (and, implicitly, male power)" on display in the Royal parlor (ix). Settling in to watch the spectacle before him, King easily adopts Royal's Southern attitude as he assures his host, "I consider it a compliment to forget that I am a stranger [...] I forgot it entirely before I had been in the house ten minutes" (Child 6). King accepts the ornamental and performative purposes of the women on display for his pleasure, aptly illustrating Child's point that the "institutions around us have an effect on character which it is difficult to escape entirely. Bad customs often lead well-meaning men into wrong paths" (23). In the antebellum portion of the novel, Child presents her male protagonist, Alfred King, with two possible paths: the "wrong" one, which endorses the full enjoyment of his white privilege and

will lead him to Royal's position as the father of illegitimate slave children, or the right one, which will require him to champion progressive race and gender ideologies as he ceases to see the mixed-race woman as a "plaything" and promotes her to wife.

The dissolute Georgia planter, Gerald Fitzgerald, epitomizes the traditionally masculine values of the first path, against which King must strive in the novel. Having prior knowledge of Rosa and Flora's racial ancestry, Fitzgerald exclaims to King, "If I were the Grand Bashaw, I would have them both in my harem" (12). When the "levity of the remark jar[s] on the feelings of his companion," Fitzgerald mockingly remarks, "I forgot you were from the land of Puritans" (12, 13). Whereas King finds the comment an insult to Rosa and Flora, Fitzgerald's knowledge of the girls' heritage allows him to consider it a "compliment to their superlative beauty" as he believes they can never hope to rise any higher than mistress positions (13). Fitzgerald's attitude suggests that octoroon women exist solely for the pleasure of white men, the "Grand Bashaw[s]" of the South. He makes his feelings clear when King asks about Royal's wife. Fitzgerald matter-of-factly tells him, "They were not married [...] Of course not, for she was a quadroon" (13). His nonchalant attitude towards Rosa and Flora's illegitimacy as well as their mother's concubinage implies that, though he openly courts Rosa, his intentions are less than honorable. By contrast, King later relates his father's encounter with women from a harem while in Turkey, claiming it "affected him painfully" and "forced upon him the idea what different beings those women would have been if they had been brought up amid the free churches and free schools of New England" (24). Instead of fantasizing about the possibility of having beautiful sex slaves, King's father concludes, and teaches King to believe, that slavery is "a cumulative poison in the veins of this Republic" (24). Scholars like Nelson have drawn comparisons between Fitzgerald's harem comment and King's "Grand Bashaw"-like experience in the Royal parlor, ultimately

claiming that King fails to differentiate himself in his attitude toward African American women from the Southerners he harshly judges. However, I connect King's recitation of the Turkish harem story with Fitzgerald's previous comment to reveal how the novel pits Fitzgerald and King against each other in terms of masculine and racial ideology, exemplified in how they treat Rosa as her successive husbands.³ Fitzgerald, standing in for an antebellum type of masculinity, knows only how to exploit his racial and gender "inferiors." King's task, as the representative of Child's reconstructed postwar white masculinity, will be to raise Rosa from the racial and sexual degradation of the "harem" by introducing her to the "free churches and free schools of New England."

Obviously perturbed by the idea of Rosa's potential exploitation, King adopts a prewar Northern attitude that denies his involvement in the matter and casts Rosa's future as someone else's problem. Thoughts of Fitzgerald's words and intentions continue to haunt King, causing him to experience a "harsh discord" of feelings, but he quickly brushes aside these feelings, thinking, "What is it to *me* whether he marries her or not?" (17). It is this attitude of assumed indifference that Child works to rewrite in both King and her readers as the novel progresses. Rewriting this indifference will require King, and readers, to overcome ingrained prejudices against African Americans, however. Already in love with Rosa, King "felt painfully the false position in which they [octoroons] were placed by the unreasoning prejudice of society" (14).

³ Edward Said's definition of the "Orient" as one of the West's "deepest and most recurring images of the Other" adds an additional dimension of opposition between King and Fitzgerald (1). While nineteenth-century texts typically identify the nonwhite body as the Other, Fitzgerald's identification with the Grand Bashaw sets him up as the Other in this novel. Much as "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience," Child's decision to portray Fitzgerald as an emulator of Oriental life and culture suggests that he, not the mixed-race woman, is the "image, idea, personality, experience" that Child contrasts with King (Said 1-2). Said's work on Orientalism helps readers understand how Child's novel recasts the Southern patriarch and his antiquated way of life as the real Other in American culture, a subtle indication that Child has no intentions of reconciling North and South in this novel. Instead, she focuses her efforts on removing the stigma from othered African Americans, rehabilitating them as members of the national family.

Despite his sympathy for the sisters' plight and his own growing attachment to Rosa, King acknowledges that "My own good mother shares this prejudice. How could I introduce them to *her*?" (14). The "recollection of Boston relatives rose up like an iceberg between him and fairy-land" because King cannot yet overcome the "unreasoning prejudice" within himself, engendered by fears of what society would think of him on account of his mixed-race bride (25). Limited by his own prejudices as well as his fear of social reactions if he were to marry a mixed-race woman, King retreats home to his invalid mother and disappears from the plot for ten chapters, leaving Fitzgerald to take his place. As *The Garies* makes clear, King has good reason to fear social opinion for violating the marriage contract. However it is this fear of punishment that Child works to overcome in the novel. By refusing to be cowed by the threat of punishment for stepping over the color line, King can take the first steps toward erasing the color line altogether.

In King's absence, the typical tale of seduction and abandonment ensues. Royal's sudden death makes possible Fitzgerald's dream of taking both Rosa and Flora into his Southern harem. Having left no manumission papers, Royal dooms his daughters to be sold as part of his indebted estate. Fitzgerald poses as the hero who hatches a plan to help the girls escape New Orleans. Under the pretext that they are to be legally married before their escape, Rosa agrees to Fitzgerald's plan. In her naiveté, she does not realize that their marriage is not legal because she is an octoroon, nor does she suspect Fitzgerald's motives when he reassures her that "you shall never be the property of any man but myself," a statement that belies his intention to keep her as his slave (61). Rosa takes Fitzgerald at his word, and she and Flora escape to a secluded cottage on a Georgia island where he later joins them. On his island plantation, Fitzgerald literalizes the harem he had spoken of only wistfully to King. In addition to the slave women with whom the

text implies that Fitzgerald has regular relations, he adds Rosa, his nominal wife, and Flora, of whom he begins to demand sexual favors. Unaware of her husband's sexual advances toward her sister or his courting of a white bride, Rosa lives in domestic bliss, thinking nothing of his long absences from the island or his prohibitions upon her proximity to the plantation house.⁴

After Rosa discovers Fitzgerald's legal wife, Lily Bell, she confronts him with her prior claim, asserting the authority of their New Orleans marriage. At this moment, Fitzgerald reveals his deceptive character, deciding that it is "necessary for you to understand your true position. You are not my wife. The man who married us had no legal authority to perform the ceremony" (141). Less than a wife, "You are my slave. I bought you of your father's creditors before I went to Nassau. I can sell you any day I choose; and, by Jove, I will" (143). This sudden transformation from wife to property marks Rosa as both racially other and sexually fallen, but as other scholars have argued, Child uses the multiple wives plot to prove that Fitzgerald cannot degrade Rosa's black womanhood without also degrading Lily Bell's white womanhood and the sanctity of the white home.⁵ Fitzgerald's deception of both women enables Child to use his character as a representation of the harm that a traditional masculinity, which holds both women and African Americans as the property of white men, has done to marital relations, race relations, and the nation. As the duplicitous slaveholder, Fitzgerald creates complex family relationships resulting in a schism between the black and white branches of his family that can only be resolved by a reconstructed masculinity willing to legitimize black relatives. Drunk and indebted,

⁴ The sisters' stories diverge when Flora runs away and is fortuitously adopted by Lila Delano.

⁵ Karcher notes the similarities in Rosa and Lily Bell's positions: "As ignorant of her status as Rosa is of hers, and unaware of Rosa's existence, the new Mrs. Fitzgerald does not realize that she, too, is a victim of patriarchy and slavery – that her husband has bought her only for her father's money, and that her father, in turn, has sold her for her husband's plantation and his own business prospects in the South" (517). Despite their racial differences, both women are treated as property to be traded by fathers and husbands. For an excellent discussion of the implicit comparisons Child draws between slavery and patriarchy, see Karcher's *The First Woman in the Republic*.

Fitzgerald carries through on his promise to sell Rosa. Rosa's experience in the South leaves her alienated not only from the family she thinks she has found in Fitzgerald but from the national family as well. Under the protection of foreign friends, Rosa makes her escape to Europe, leaving behind her newborn son, whom she has swapped with Fitzgerald's white son.

While many scholars have argued that it is Rosa who needs to be recuperated during this time in Europe after her sale into slavery and sham marriage to Fitzgerald, I argue that Child reveals not Rosa but Alfred King to be her target for reconstruction when he reappears nearly halfway through the novel. Before he can lead in the process of national Reconstruction, King must distance himself from the prejudices of his cold New England relatives and adopt new attitudes toward race and gender. His prejudiced mother now dead, he returns to New Orleans upon news of Royal's death, only to learn that the girls have been sold as part of their father's estate. A far cry from Fitzgerald's desire to lower Rosa and Flora to the position of property, when King hears the girls described as such, he exclaims, "Property! Such a term applied to women makes me an Abolitionist" (164). This response marks the contrast between Fitzgerald and King's perception of the girls, especially Rosa, demonstrating King's own growth and his development of an alternative masculinity during his absence from the novel, but it also ties together the notion of women and slaves as property. King experiences an awakening that enables him to see not only the evil of keeping African Americans as property but of lowering wives and daughters to the status of property in the hands of husbands and fathers. Compared to the man who shrugged off Rosa's potential concubinage and shied away from introducing a mixed-race bride to bigoted relatives, King now actively seeks to rescue Rosa from slavery, going so far as to declare himself against the entire concept of slavery. That King can now feel disgust at the reduction of women, specifically African American women, to property suggests

that King has overcome the temptation he endured in the first few pages of the novel to see Royal's daughters as "plaything[s]" (Child 6). He even confesses that "he would have married her [Rosa] if he could, in full view of all her antecedents, and even with his mother's prejudices to encounter" (169). His willingness to pursue Rosa as a wife indicates the development of a new type of masculinity that redefines a woman's value beyond her racial heritage and sexual purity; King comes to see both women and African Americans not as property for his own amusement but as human beings worthy of his consideration. In this regard, Fitzgerald's proclamation that Rosa "shall never be the property of any man but myself" proves to be quite prophetic as King determines never to think of his ex-slave wife as property, either because of her race or gender (61).

Child works a change in King's feelings toward Rosa and toward slavery, but her ultimate goal is to bring about a change in his actions to make him a suitable leader of Reconstruction. To do this, she removes her characters from the United States, where prejudices circumscribe all of their actions and interactions. In Italy, King's reconstructed masculinity clashes with Fitzgerald's traditional masculinity as both men pursue Rosa. Informed by her guardians of Rosa's successful escape to Europe, King rushes to find her in Italy, arriving just in time to rescue her from an unfortunate reencounter with Fitzgerald. His possessive desire piqued by Rosa's lauded opera debut, Fitzgerald barges into Rosa's room unannounced, "seize[s] her hand and kisse[s] it passionately" (235). "Kneeling, still pleading vehemently for forgiveness," Fitzgerald begs Rosa to return to him as his mistress (235). Aggressive physical contact characterizes Fitzgerald's brief interview: "He seized her hand and kissed it," she "forcibly [withdrew] the hand to which he clung," he "strove to clutch the folds of her robe" (234-235). This interview demonstrates Fitzgerald's desperation, but the physical contact he forces upon

Rosa suggests his lack of respect for her as a proper woman and perhaps his more sinister intentions of sexual assault should she continue to refuse him, all of which indicate an unreconstructed masculinity that remains incapable of respecting the physical rights of former slaves and “fallen” women. Neither does Fitzgerald suggest any interest in changing his ways. To Fitzgerald’s exclamation that “I have always loved you as I never loved any other woman,” Rosa responds, “Your being here does me injury” because of the existence of his legal wife (235). Still clearly intent upon maintaining his position in society through the existence of his white wife, Fitzgerald offers professions of love only in hopes of weakening Rosa’s moral fortitude in an effort to convince her to return to him as his mistress. Rosa couches her reproach in terms of masculinity when she demands, “If you have any manhood in you, leave me” (235). It is precisely the nature of Fitzgerald’s manhood that Child means for readers to question. Having already proven his disrespect for Rosa, Fitzgerald further fulfills Rosa’s implicit accusation that he lacks “manhood” when he must be forcefully ejected from her chambers.

At this moment, King fortuitously, and inexplicably, appears in Rosa’s chamber to remove Fitzgerald from the premises. In contrast to Fitzgerald’s crazed fervor and disrespect for Rosa, King “soothingly” and in “a manly voice” reminds Fitzgerald that “scenes like this are unfit for a lady’s apartment” (236). Accepting Rosa’s offered hand, King “clasped it for an instant. But though the touch thrilled him, he betrayed no emotion,” and he quickly “relinquish[ed] it with a respectful bow” (237). Contrasting sharply with Fitzgerald’s treatment of her, King shows the same respect for Rosa as he would for a “virtuous” white woman. Despite his own attraction to Rosa, King plays the gentleman, and restraint characterizes his interaction with her. Fitzgerald, in turn, questions such a masculinity that can value the mixed-race, deflowered Rosa as a lady. When King suggests that “you surely will not remain in a lady’s

house after she has requested you to quit it,” Fitzgerald implicitly attacks both King and Rosa on the grounds of their gender performance (237). “Where ladies command,” he replies, “I am of course bound to obey” (237). Contrasted with his decidedly ungentlemanly behavior toward Rosa, Fitzgerald’s use of the term “lady,” supplied by King, can only be sarcastic. More interestingly, Fitzgerald makes the word plural, though Rosa is the only woman present. Given that it is King at this moment, not Rosa, who has issued the command for Fitzgerald to “quit” the house, Fitzgerald’s intentional use of the plural suggests an attack on what he views as King’s feminized masculinity. This simple response performs the dual task of impugning Rosa’s right to claim the title of “lady” as well as the nature of King’s masculinity. However, Child’s descriptions of King’s “manly voice” and commanding presence—he alone succeeds in finally expelling Fitzgerald after the maid, Rosa, and Rosa’s guardian have all failed—clearly direct readers to approve of his reconstructed “manhood” while questioning Fitzgerald’s grotesque, traditional masculinity.

Through this confrontation scene between King and Fitzgerald, Child juxtaposes reconstructed and unreconstructed masculine attitudes toward the mixed-race woman. Even without the context of American race prejudice, Fitzgerald sees Rosa as an inferior being, fit only to be his mistress and ultimately his property. King, by contrast, has learned to see Rosa apart from the social stigmas assigned to her. Though he occasionally questions, “What would my dear prudential mother say, to see me leaving my business to agents and clerks, while I devote my life to the service of an opera-singer,” he concludes that “Rosabella must be seen as a pure, good soul, in eyes that see as the angels do” (245, 246). Indeed, according to Child’s plan, it is King who “see[s] as the angels do” after the removal of the prejudiced haze that initially clouds his vision. His transition from disinterested bystander to abolitionist to Rosa’s protector

marks a transformation in King's character, especially compared to Fitzgerald's sexually aggressive pleading and unchanged desire to keep Rosa as his mistress. This transition maps Child's postwar project to reconstruct white masculinity as a whole, beginning with the individual white suitor.

Instead of mistress, King offers Rosa the position of wife, a plot point that symbolizes the reconstructed white man's ability to initiate the process of racial reunion. Rosa's slave background, sham wedding, and sexual experience mark her as degraded, both in terms of gender and race.⁶ Having overcome his initial reservations and undergone his own transformation, King learns to think of Rosa not as a fallen woman but as the victim of social proscriptions that label her as fallen. King rises above these social strictures and approaches Rosa with the prospect of marriage. She initially resists his proposal "because a first, fresh love like yours, deserves better recompense than it could receive from a bruised and worn-out heart like mine" (250). Though Rosa's response overtly refers to her heartbreak as a result of Fitzgerald's deception, it also euphemistically compares her sexual experience with King's presumed "fresh" inexperience. Rosa reinstates her own fallen woman narrative by insisting upon her "worn-out" state and inwardly lamenting, "O, if I was only worthy of such a love!" (253). Casting aside the narrative of sexual guilt that Rosa offers, King acknowledges her trials as Fitzgerald's false wife and discredits their effect on her character. However, Rosa now offers an alternate narrative of unworthiness, her racial status, as an impediment to their marriage. She insists upon his knowing that "my mother was a slave" and "her daughters inherited her misfortune" (251). "I am aware of it," responds King, acknowledging both Rosa's racial and

⁶ As Karcher has noted, Rosa's opera career would have been "regarded as little more respectable than prostitution" (523). Even Rosa's chosen profession marks her as a fallen woman by nineteenth-century standards.

sexual degradation, “But that only makes me ashamed of my country, not of her [Rosa’s slave mother] or of them [her daughters]” (251). Seeing “as the angels to,” King looks beyond Rosa’s assigned identity—African American, “fallen” woman—and declares her “worthy” to be his wife.⁷ King’s response disregards Rosa’s responsibility for her sexual or racial degradations, instead critiquing the society that could lower a woman to the position of property and then berate her for the sexual exploitation resulting from her helpless state. He effectively declares there to be no shame in having been a slave, only in supporting the enslavement of others.

Recalling his own nonchalance at the thought of Rosa’s possible *plaçage* as well as the “iceberg” of social proscription he initially allowed to arise between himself and Rosa, we might read King’s statement as an admission of his own shame in having endorsed, even by indifference, the laws of “my country,” which cast shame upon the victim rather than the perpetrator. Through his marriage proposal, King evinces his own new perspective on the American social and legal structures that define degradation and begins the process of actively fostering racial reunion.

King’s disregard for Rosa’s would-be sordid past enables Child to “repudiate[] external measures of sexual purity along with external badges of racial and social status,” but more than repudiate, King’s response allows Child to rewrite the meaning and value of these “external badges” to envision a truly meritocratic republic that might emerge out of Reconstruction (Karcher 523). King marries Rosa because, despite “your wrongs and your sufferings,” “I have seen and heard enough to be convinced that your own heart is noble and pure” (251). Citing her

⁷ Child’s decision to name her Northern men Royal and King respectively can be no accident. King’s name implies that he is meant to rule, a hint that Child has no intention of completely overturning either racial or gender hierarchies in this novel. Interestingly though, King’s mixed-race bride, Rosa, takes the surname of her father, Royal. While Rosa might be a fallen woman of African descent, she is nonetheless of “Royal” blood and therefore fit to be the wife of a “King.” While the naming works on one level to uphold the leadership rights of the white male “King,” it also undermines the notion that the mixed-race Rosa is an unsuitable partner for him. Child’s choice of names helps to reaffirm Rosa’s worthiness.

good character as evidence of her “noble and pure” heart, King reinterprets the significance of Rosa’s “wrongs” and “sufferings” as refining fire rather than debasing trials, declaring that “your character has been elevated by it” (251). Once the badge of degradation, Rosa’s sexual exploitation and enslavement by her former lover now become the means by which “the romantic young girl has ripened into the thoughtful, prudent woman” worthy of King’s love and protection (251). Despite his praise of her improved character, the novel offers few indications that Rosa has changed much at all beyond an increased sensitivity to the slave plight as a consequence of her own experience. Instead, the text charts King’s evolution from prejudiced indifference to proactive protector. Having reconstructed King, Child now uses his character to revise “external badges of racial and social status” and align them instead with the internal character developed through trials. By privileging internal merit rather than externally granted status, Child offers a revised version of the American republic, one in which character matters more than skin color or racial ancestry. In this Reconstructed nation, formerly enslaved African Americans will be freed from the stigmas placed upon them by antebellum society and will have equal chance to rise in the rebuilt nation.⁸ The white Northern man’s role in this process, as demonstrated by King, is to recognize and reward the merit of good character where he finds it. Given the importance Child places upon King to improve the condition of African Americans through this system of recognition and reward, I turn now to an analysis of King’s controversial role in accomplishing Child’s Reconstruction vision as revealed in the latter portion of the novel.

“You Will Have a Loving Advocate to Plead Your Cause”

⁸ Child’s meritocratic utopia also offers “fallen” women the opportunity to overcome external labels and rise by virtue of their improved character in a Hester Prynne–like fashion.

Character reconstruction and interracial marriage serve only as a means of beginning the real work of reunion in the novel. King's marriage to Rosa opens the door for his involvement in the restructuring of the American family as he seeks to rectify the effects of Fitzgerald's profligacy and Rosa's baby switching, but many critics argue that this is where the novel's radical political agenda begins to disintegrate. The scholarly community agrees, pretty much unanimously, that Child's decision to have her mixed-race female protagonists pass as white precludes any radical redefinition of race relations in the novel. Furthermore, her decision to render the formerly independent Rosa entirely dependent on King for financial and emotional support as well as moral guidance seems to rob the novel of the alternate gender role possibilities it opens in the first half. I do not dispute that, when approached from the mixed-race woman's perspective, the novel fails on both fronts. However, my realignment of the critical perspective with the role of the white male protagonist in the novel offers a new understanding of the ways in which Child does achieve a redefinition of both whiteness and masculinity in *Romance* and consequently succeeds in offering a more optimistic vision of Reconstruction and reunion than scholars have previously claimed. While King's efforts to achieve family reunion toward the end of the novel are fraught with unresolved gender and racial tensions, they nevertheless provide what Child might have seen as the most viable means of reaching the racial utopia for which she strived: Reconstructed, benevolent white men who actively seek to restore African Americans to the national family and provide reparations to former slaves in hopes of creating a brighter, more unified future across races.

The convoluted family relations created by Fitzgerald's irresponsible abuse of his white male privilege and his willful ignorance of the African American descendants he has fathered emerge as key problems in need of remedy in the remaining portion of the text. It is through

these complicated family relationships, and King's role in righting them, that Child reveals her plans for reconstructing the national family through the interventions of white men like King in the postbellum period. Fearing the repercussions of the fugitive slave law should Rosa return to the United States and be discovered by Fitzgerald, her legal master, the Kings remain in Europe until they learn of Fitzgerald's mysterious death and deem it safe to return. Though the Kings have been informed of Fitzgerald's death, they only learn the cause after their arrival in Boston. Fitzgerald has in fact become a victim of the sordid family relations his sexual abuse of enslaved women has created. Most scholars cite Fitzgerald's death as a murder at the hands of a jealous slave husband. This description overlooks the more important incest plot implied in the novel. Fitzgerald's demise begins when Nelly, a young mulatto slave whose "features greatly resembled his," requests to marry another slave on the plantation, Jim, "but their master, for reasons of his own, forbade their meeting together" (341). The "reasons of his own" suggest Fitzgerald's interest in reserving Nelly for his own sexual use, despite the fact that she is obviously his own daughter. Fitzgerald's response when Nelly "tried to elude his vigilance" supports this reading; to prevent the lovers from engaging in secret encounters, Fitzgerald sells her lover to a slave trader (342). This "vigilance" and subsequent retaliation by selling Jim are actions more suggestive of a jealous lover than a concerned father. Jim escapes the trader and, unbeknownst to Fitzgerald, reappears to enact his revenge upon his master. Jim's murderous intentions, though ostensibly a response to his sale away from his wife, likely also stem from a desire to avenge Nelly's abuse at her master/father's hands. Informed of Jim's escape and supposing him to have returned for Nelly, Fitzgerald rides off in search of him. However, "the horse came back in the evening with an empty saddle, and he never returned," facts that suggest a carefully planned murder rather than a merely accidental disappearance (343). Nelly likewise vanishes the next day,

presumably having eloped with Jim. The harem fantasy that Fitzgerald transformed into reality in the first half of the novel becomes his undoing in the second half. Though the narrative clearly names Nelly as Fitzgerald's daughter by a slave woman, Fitzgerald refuses to acknowledge his paternal relation to his slave daughter and makes sexual advances toward her, a crime for which he pays with his life.⁹ Fitzgerald's insistence upon recognizing only white family relationships makes possible this incest and revenge plot, a clear warning to postwar Americans not to repeat the sins of their fathers by ignoring African Americans' rightful place in the national family.

Pages after the truth behind Fitzgerald's demise is revealed, another incest threat develops, providing readers an opportunity to compare the outcome of Fitzgerald's approach to interracial family to King's. The Kings arrive in Boston and are greeted by Fitzgerald's widow, Lily Bell, and her son, who begins courting the Kings' daughter, Eulalia. Believing her son by Fitzgerald dead, Rosa has neglected to tell King that she swapped this son with Fitzgerald's nearly identical white heir before escaping the plantation. In a moment of dread, Rosa recognizes Gerald Fitzgerald Jr. as the son she abandoned before fleeing to Europe and as Eulalia's half-brother. This threat of incest between Eulalia King and Gerald Fitzgerald Jr. serves as an opportunity for King to set right the wrongs of the Southern patriarch. Compelled to reveal the truth by Gerald and Eulalia's growing attachment, Rosa confesses to King her connection with Gerald. Though she expects outrage, she meets only compassion from King, who implicitly shifts responsibility onto Fitzgerald and his abuses when he reassures Rosa that "You surely had suffering enough to drive you wild" (352). King immediately springs into action to prevent a further courtship between his stepson and daughter, but he does not believe his duty ends merely

⁹ The tale of Fitzgerald's insatiable and incestuous lusts as well as his death at the hands of a jealous slave husband rehearse the dire predictions of Child's earlier short story "Slavery's Pleasant Homes" and Richard Hildreth's 1836 novel *The Slave: or Memoirs of Archy Moore*, both of which envision the traumas that result from only recognizing white family relations.

in severing romantic contact between Eulalia and Gerald. Instead, King accepts responsibility for revealing the truth of these complicated family relations and righting the wrongs against alienated family members.

Rather than simply turning Gerald away and averting the incest threat, King steps in to become Gerald's mentor, and after explaining the truth of Gerald's parentage, King helps him process his new mixed-race identity, his feelings toward Rosa, and his position in society. Gerald balks at the revelation of his black ancestry and enslaved mother. King, however, imparting his own hard-won wisdom, encourages him to look at the situation "in the plain sunlight of truth, unchanged by looking at it through the deceptive colored glasses of conventional prejudice" (358). Having overcome his own prejudice, King now takes on the role of educator as he helps Gerald to remove the "colored glasses of conventional prejudice" that see him as "stained" (358). King's own journey in the first half of the novel prepares him to retrain Gerald to feel "honored to claim my highly accomplished and noble-minded wife as a near relative" despite the fact that "her grandmother had a dark complexion" (358). In reasoning with Gerald to help him accept his altered racial status, King goes so far as to invert the stain narrative, claiming "if there were any blot resting upon you, it would come from your father," whose white privilege enabled him to take advantage of multiple women (358). King teaches Gerald to see the world in a new light, a light that exposes the sins of the white forefathers, the sufferings of the African American foremothers, and the true basis of merit. Fitzgerald's white heritage no more prevents him from becoming a "blot" upon his son's good name than Rosa's African ancestry necessarily causes her to be a "stain" upon her son's social standing. Rather, King counsels Gerald to esteem his "accomplished and noble-minded" mother because of her character but to "let his [father's] career be a warning to you to resist the enticements of evil" (359). Through his mentorship of

Gerald, King begins to shape cultural perspectives on race and merit. He effectively separates the two, teaching Gerald to see merit as the product of good character rather than skin color. King's mentorship of the younger generation paves the way for a meritocracy founded on the ideal of good character rather than the virtue of white skin.

Beyond helping Gerald re-conceptualize the meaning of his mixed-race heritage, King does for Gerald what his biological father never would have done had he known that Gerald was in reality Rosa's son—acknowledge the family relationship existing between them. King openly claims Gerald as family, reminding him that “you are my step-son, you know; and should you at any time of your life need my services, you may rely upon me as an affectionate father” (359). King expresses his desire to fulfill fatherly duties toward Gerald, the illegitimate, mixed-race son, as a step toward mending the complicated family relations to which slavery has given rise. Fitzgerald's sins linger over the knotted family relations that King must disentangle, but King's expansion of his conception of family to recognize Fitzgerald's illegitimate son as a legal stepson, in sharp contrast to Fitzgerald's demonstrated denial of paternal relation to his mixed-race offspring, moves toward a revised national family that includes African Americans. This familial inclusion assures access to more than a nominal father-son or mentor-mentee relationship; King pledges to Gerald that “I will gladly assist you” in learning to “devote yourself assiduously to some business, profession, or art,” an assurance that potentially encompasses both financial and educational backing for Gerald's future plans (380-381). King's decision to welcome Gerald into the family is more than an empty gesture toward reconciliation; it is a promise to ensure that, as Gerald's stepfather, King will recompense any inheritance Gerald might lose after the revelation of his racial heritage.

Such questions of who counts as family versus who does not become increasingly important as King contemplates the property and inheritance rights of Fitzgerald's remaining heirs. In a long side plot, Gerald departs to fight in the Civil War and chances to encounter his near-identical twin while encamped near another regiment. George Faulkner, as this twin has decided to call himself based on the cryptic initials that have been tattooed on him as long as he can remember, relates to Gerald his tale of slavery, sale, escape to Boston, recapture, and re-enslavement. Gerald immediately notifies King of his belief that Faulkner is the lost son. King discovers it to be so and makes arrangements to rescue and educate Faulkner's wife while the war continues. Aside from ensuring that Gerald will be provided for, King determines to see that both he and George inherit equally, either from Fitzgerald's remaining estate or from King's own estate, as rightful sons. Having "taken some pains to ascertain the amount" of Gerald's inheritance from his grandfather Bell, as well as Lily's inheritance from her father, which would eventually pass to Gerald, King calculates the sum due to Faulkner and his wife, Henriette, and decides to "add a codicil to my will leaving an equal sum to George" (415). King also makes provisions for the Faulkners' future, determining it "the worst thing you could do [...] to let them know that they have a claim to riches" (414). Instead, King takes Henriette into the family employ, setting Rosa to "watch[] over her morals, and furnish[] her with opportunities to improve her mind" (414-415). After the war, he makes provisions to "take him [Faulkner] to Europe and have him educated in a manner suitable to his condition" (393).

Set to inherit his grandfather Bell's fortune, Gerald, unlike his half-brother, initially had little need of King's financial backing; however, when Bell discovers Gerald's illegitimacy and mixed-parentage, he threatens to disown him. "Do you suppose, sir," Bell exclaims at King, "that a merchant of my standing is going to leave his property to negroes?" (393). Bell identifies both

Gerald and Faulkner as “negroes,” despite King’s reminder that “this young man [Faulkner] is pure Anglo-Saxon” (393). Gerald’s “negro blood” makes him an objectionable heir, but Faulkner’s socialization as a slave and, more importantly, his choice of a “mulatto” wife cause Bell to consider him another of the “negroes” making an assault on his fortune rather than a legitimate white heir (393). Though Faulkner is now Lily Bell’s only surviving child, and presumably Bell’s only surviving grandchild, Bell avows, “I’ll never see him [Faulkner], nor have anything to do with him, unless he gives her [his mulatto wife] up” (393). Harkening back to Garie’s violation of the marriage contract and his forfeiture of white status, Faulkner’s choice of bride, apart from his slave upbringing, prevents him from adopting the white identity and privilege now held out to him by the revelation of his true birthmother. Bell, acting much as Fitzgerald would have done given his past actions, denies the legitimacy of either son as an heir. The enraged Bell dies of a heart attack before he can change his will to exclude Gerald, but Faulkner remains unacknowledged and unprovided for until King steps in to offer his own fortune.

As a result, money and the flow of property in the novel become the means of verifying acceptance into a family.¹⁰ Rejected by the Bells, both Gerald and the Faulkners find an adoptive family in the Kings, who promise them an inheritance. Speaking of Flora’s adoption by Lila, Clymer states that the arrangement creates “a newly legalized access to white wealth for Flora [...] [B]y making her the ‘daughter of a woman with ‘a large fortune,’ Child’s narrative imagines a new family that provides a more solid right to white wealth for the legally black young girl” (Clymer 109). I argue that King’s decision to act as stepfather and legal guardian of

¹⁰ The flow of property between individuals as a sign of acceptance into a family holds true throughout the novel. For instance, Lila Delano provides Flora’s future husband with the financial means to succeed in business and become a suitable marriage partner for Flora, who will inherit Lila’s fortune. Having already accepted Flora as a daughter, Lila uses her money to create a son.

both Gerald and Faulkner functions similarly to create a new family for the now legally black Gerald and the formerly enslaved Faulkner. Specifically, this family arrangement provides both young men with access to an inheritance, made possible by King, who hopes to show “how little I value money in comparison with righting this wrong, as far as possible” (394). While Bell’s refusal to allow either grandson to inherit his fortune perpetuates Fitzgerald’s own refusal to claim relationship with mixed-race kin, these newly created lines of inheritance established by King confirm King’s pseudo-paternal relationship to both young men. Child replaces Fitzgerald, the abusive Southern patriarch who willfully denies his connection to mixed-race and/or enslaved offspring, with King, the benevolent Northern father who acknowledges, adopts, and provides for both of Fitzgerald’s disinherited sons. King’s final and most radical step in leading the process of Reconstruction is to guarantee not only familial recognition but familial inheritance rights to those enslaved and/or African American relations previously ignored and excluded from family property rights.

Many scholars have criticized Child for this overtly patronizing resolution to the Faulkner inheritance plot, and undoubtedly, King’s benevolence toward the Faulkners reeks of his own white privilege, which ensures his own access to wealth as well as his ability to arrange the Faulkners’ financial matters for them without their consent.¹¹ Despite his good intentions, King infantilizes the former slave couple, assuming them incapable of managing their own affairs until they have been successfully re-educated not only as free people but also as white people—a troubling solution indeed. However, Child’s solution works to spread King’s white privilege, specifically in the form of property but also in the form of education, to the next generation of nonwhites who will continue the process of rebuilding the nation and, thanks to King, will have

¹¹ See Karcher, Clymer, and Yellin, among others.

to tools necessary to do so. While this white-male-dominated process of Reconstruction may not be a satisfying solution to racial reunion for the modern reader, Child clearly works out a long-term Reconstruction plan, spanning generations beyond the novel's scope, in *Romance* that scholars have not acknowledged. Moreover, though the retraining of Henriette's "morals" in the fashion of white America strikes today's reader as condescending and dismissive of African American culture, this moral instruction, from Child's perspective, might have been a necessary step in building the character-based meritocracy she envisions at moments throughout the novel. King himself has undergone such a retraining program, so it is important to note that Child does not limit her moral reform purely to nonwhite characters; considering King's own moral transformation over the course of the novel, I contend that Child invests more effort in reforming her white characters than her African American characters in the novel.

The closing tableau in the novel presents the capstone celebration of the Reconstruction goals that Child achieves through King. Performed to welcome King home from his service in the Civil War, this tableau nevertheless has not been read in light of what Child intended it to be—an homage to King, the reformed white man who uses his privilege to achieve racial reunion:

Under festoons of the American flag, surmounted by the eagle, stood Eulalia, in ribbons of red, white, and blue, with a circle of stars round her head. One hand upheld the shield of the Union, and in the other the scales of Justice were evenly poised. By her side stood Rosen Blumen, holding in one hand a gilded pole surmounted by a liberty-cap, while her other hand rested protectingly on the head of Tulee's Benny, who was kneeling and looking upward in thanksgiving. (440)¹²

Eve Allegra Raimon hesitatingly praises the final scene as "the apotheosis of the reformer's vision, an emblem for the multiracial family of the reunited and reconsecrated republic," but she

¹² Rosen Blumen is Flora's daughter. Benny is the son of Tulee, Rosa and Flora's dark-skinned servant.

ultimately concludes that, if this is indeed the “apotheosis of the reformer’s vision,” it only succeeds “in reinscribing hierarchies of race even as it glorifies prevailing ideologies of Anglo-American supremacy” (60, 61). Jean Fagan Yellin likewise reads the scene as a reinforcement of racial stereotypes, claiming that “this assignment of the role of liberator to the light-skinned girl and the role of grateful kneeling ex-slave to the dark child suggests an endorsement of white superiority that contradicts egalitarian claims” Child makes throughout the novel (75). Child’s vision fails, in other words, because it privileges white over black, continuing to portray whites as the protectors of “kneeling,” thankful blacks. My reading does not necessarily mitigate these critiques. Having approached the novel from King’s perspective, I argue that this tableau suggests what King has made possible through his character evolution, intermarriage, and property redistribution. As the father of the mixed-race Eulalia, King has created the mixed-race body that stands in for the body of the nation here. Unlike her mother, Rosa, Eulalia enjoys the privileges of being a legitimate child, brought into a legal relationship with the nation through her parents’ marriage. Though Eulalia and Rosen Blumen may be lighter-skinned than Benny, they are still descendants of African mothers. Their position at the national helm makes possible Benny’s future rise. While Benny’s kneeling position might suggest his inferiority or subservience, it might also imply that he is in the act of rising under the protecting hand of liberty held out by a mixed-race woman. The novel largely privileges King as the champion of Reconstruction who makes this final tableau possible. Worth noting, however, is the fact that women, specifically mixed-race women, lead and protect rising African Americans in this vision of the national future, not white men.¹³ King’s triumphs, both literally on the battlefield and

¹³ Historically, both the concept of nation and liberty have been envisioned as female, so it seems obvious that Child would choose female characters to make up this tableau. However, scholars should not take for granted Child’s choice of a tableau that would portray empowered women of mixed heritage.

figuratively throughout the novel, may make this scene possible, but Child suggests that the future of racial reunion will be led by these mixed-race children, not their white fathers. In this way, Child acknowledges what she sees as the initial need for white male leadership in the project of Reconstruction but leaves the future of this leadership open to women and men of color.¹⁴

My interpretation of *Romance* does not erase the disturbingly racist undertones of the novel, nor is it meant to do so; in some regards, my reading heightens awareness to Child's white, patriarchal bias expressed through King, but it also gives modern readers a means of understanding how Child might have considered the novel an achievement on the path to racial reunion rather than the failure most scholars consider it to be today. If her novel fails to transcend typical nineteenth-century gender and racial stereotypes or appears to be complicit in the schemes of white-male dominance, this shortcoming likely stems more from Child's own resignation to the way the system worked than her sense of how marital or race relations should actually function. The reality of male-dominated marriage relationships and white-dominated race relationships undoubtedly seem to be constraints that limit the radicalness of her Reconstruction vision, yet Child's larger body of work suggests that, rather than seeing benevolent patriarchy as an end, she saw sympathetic paternalism as an initial step toward racial

¹⁴ Missing from this picture of domestic and national bliss is Gerald Fitzgerald, the dissolute Southerner who set the plot in motion, or any Southerner for that matter. Conveniently killing off Fitzgerald before she ushers in her mixed-race utopia, Child's knowing omission conceptualizes reunion as something that must take place between African Americans and their Northern allies rather than between Northerners and their Southern enemies or ex-slaves and their former masters. In this regard, Child departs from the reconstruction visions of many contemporary African American writers, who, as William Andrews has explained, took it upon themselves to return to the South and seek reconciliation with their masters. Not only does Child make reconstruction the burden of the white man rather than African Americans, she also seems relatively uninvested in the idea of any kind of reunion with the South. Reunion takes place between white Northerners and former slaves in this novel, leaving Southerners out of the reunion picture entirely.

and gender equality that would fade away in time.¹⁵ Child makes clear in a way that no other postwar author does the imperative of changing white (male) notions of race, gender, and status if reunion as she defines it is ever to be achieved and Reconstruction successful.¹⁶

Viewed in this light, Child's most important success in *Romance* has been overlooked by scholars up to this point. Much as modern readers would like to see her as a forward-thinking novelist who championed African American and women's rights in a manner well beyond her contemporaries, Child does not offer an alternative to patriarchal relations between whites and blacks, nor does she reimagine marriage as an equitable institution. She remains bound by the biases of her own moment in time. However, through her reconstruction of Alfred King, Child achieves a radical refashioning of the power and purpose of white male privilege in the postbellum period, something none of her contemporaries managed—or wanted—to do. Given that a decade beforehand, Frank Webb's novel had imagined the dire consequences suffered by a white patriarch who tried to redistribute his wealth to his black wife and children, Child's reimagining of the white suitor as the bringer of racial equality and economic justice offers a radical perspective on the potential for a white men's revised role in a postbellum world.

Child's definition of reunion as a cross-racial rather than cross-sectional endeavor is a radical stance in and of itself, considering that it aligned her with the African American rather than the white authors of her day, but her take on Reconstruction is perhaps what made this text less than palatable to her Northern readers. Thrilled with what she thought would be her magnum

¹⁵ Many of Child's antebellum works detail white male abuse of privilege and the consequences of that abuse for women and African Americans. As a body, her literature reveals a deep-seated skepticism of white male privilege that leads me to believe that Child was more likely to see any revision of the use of that privilege as a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

¹⁶ Though King does work near the end of the novel to effect familial reunion for both Gerald and Faulkner, much of the reunion that takes place occurs between King and Rosa, suggesting that Child's notion of reunion might be gendered as well as racial. Carolyn Karcher touches on this notion of gendered reunion somewhat in *First Woman of the Republic*.

opus in terms of its artistic and political achievements, Child was stunned and disappointed by the reception of *Romance*. Karcher explains that the novel met with “embarrassed silence, polite platitudes, or ‘cold’ dismissals” from close friends (530). Many former abolitionists “ignored the book and Child’s ongoing concerns about intensifying racial prejudice,” confirming her belief that “antislavery sentiment did not eliminate racism” (Nelson xix). Depressed by the novel’s flop, Child never wrote another work of fiction again in her career. Much of this poor reception may be attributable to the fact that, in addition to redefining reunion, Child also reconsiders who and what need to be reconstructed in the postbellum period. The answer proves to be less than welcome to a Northern audience. Neither of the mixed-race female protagonists in the novel needs to be reconstructed; rather, the characters and society that surround them must be reconditioned to see them as other than stigmatized and accept them. Though King praises Rosa for having grown from her trials, Rosa and Flora change little throughout the course of the novel and their individual trials.¹⁷ Rather, Child portrays King’s attitude toward the girls and their potential stigmas as evolving. Likewise, Southern profligate Gerald Fitzgerald never changes in the course of the novel and, in fact, goes to his death a gambling drunkard at the hands of a jealous slave whose wife he has molested. It is the white Northern protagonists Alfred King and, as other scholars have written about in detail, Lila Delano, who are in need of reconstruction. Throughout the course of the novel, King in particular must reassess his gender and race standards to come to see Rosa not only as an acceptable but a desirable partner. Though the evolution of King’s character might not constitute the end of patriarchy for Child, it does represent a viable means through which to begin redefining race and gender stigmas as well as

¹⁷ In fact, as Karcher has noted, Lila’s attempts to change Flora fail so miserably that she at last concludes that she will have to change to make room for Flora (Karcher 520).

membership in the national family. Through King, Child offers her most radical approach to Reconstruction by revealing that this process should have more to do with Northerners than it does with Southerners.

A reading of the evolution of King's character yields a more nuanced view of Child's Reconstruction plan, revealing the ways in which this vision does succeed in the latter half of the novel, the half with which critics take most issue. Though limited in her vision by a structure that she cannot completely reimagine, Child does the next best thing: she rewrites the nature of the patriarchs to make them sympathetic to women and minority figures. In essence, she develops a culture of benevolent white male leaders. While this is not the most radical or controversial solution imaginable for a modern readership, Child's notion of reconstructing white men to create a culture of trickle-down racial improvement offers what she sees as a practical solution in the only world she knew—a world run by white men.

Coda: "The Man whom She Ought Always to Have Loved"

Child was not alone in using marriage as a literary device to imagine reunion, though she was alone in her use of *interracial* marriage as a metaphor for reunion. As I transition from Child's optimistic picture of racial reunion in 1867 in this chapter to the next chapter, in which I discuss works of the late 1880s that used the interracial marriage plot to confirm a national reunion around white male privilege, I pause to mention another marriage plot phenomenon that competed with and foreshadowed the failure of Child's vision: the intersectional romance. This type of fiction developed around the trope of the Northern man subduing and wedding a rebellious Southern woman. Reconciliation fiction, as historian Nina Silber has called the genre, emerged in the 1860s but proliferated in 1870s; "it was precisely as the Reconstruction experiment waned that this image of marital reunion became popular," according to Silber (64).

“This image of marriage between northern men and southern women,” she explains, “stood at the foundation of the late-nineteenth-century culture of conciliation and became a symbol which defined and justified the northern view of the power relations in the reunified nation” (7). As Silber makes clear, intersectional marriage narratives served the purpose not only of figuratively reuniting North and South but of gendering that reunion, ensuring that the North would continue to occupy the position of dominance over a submissive, feminine South even as the nation moved toward reunion.¹⁸ Despite its tendency to portray the South as subject to Northern authority, this genre nevertheless privileged a sectional reunion between whites over a reconciliation of blacks and whites, portraying whites of both sections as authorities over African American characters. This fictional vision of reunion emerged simultaneously with Child’s and quickly gained support where Child’s did not.

Published in the same year as *Romance*, John William DeForest’s *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion from Secession to Loyalty*, among the first works of fiction to employ intersectional marriage as a metaphor for reunion, represents the early public opinions against which Child fought, and eventually lost, in *A Romance of the Republic*. In DeForest’s novel, sectional reunion triumphs at the expense of racial reunion when Union soldier Edward Colburne rescues and weds former Southern rebel Lillie Ravenel. Though Colburne and Lillie engage in preliminary flirtations, the eruption of the Civil War and the appearance of the more conventionally masculine Southerner, Colonel Carter, turn Lillie’s head. Through the deprivations of war and a disastrous marriage to Carter, Lillie learns to appreciate Colburne’s slower-burning devotion and

¹⁸ Child’s novel also genders racial reunion in ways that similarly maintain power dynamics between blacks and whites, portraying the white Northern man as the protective savior while rendering African Americans as submissive, female partners.

dependability over Carter's easily ignited passion and spontaneity.¹⁹ This is primarily a novel about the South learning to value Northern masculinity as the superior brand. DeForest's novel captures an attitude more representative of Northern white America's feelings toward the meaning and process of reunion than does Child's. This desire for sectional reunion would only grow stronger as the nation moved further away from the war. Consequently, alternate versions of reunion, including Child's, began to fade as the vision of a united white America gained dominance.²⁰

In this tale of intersectional marriage, racial reconstruction takes a back seat. Former slaves enter the background of the text, mainly as shiftless subjects who need to be motivated to work by their new Northern overlords. While the Ravenels do embark on a supposed project of racial uplift when they put former slaves to work on a plantation and open a school for the children, the narrator's biases often belie a disbelief in the ability of these projects to succeed in overcoming African Americans' "centuries of barbarism," a sentiment only heightened by the Ravenel's eventual willingness to abandon the experiment altogether (268). DeForest's vision of racial reconstruction recreates many of the conditions of slavery and perpetuates white supremacy by assuming that black laborers require white oversight to compel them to work. Discussing what to do with the free blacks in Louisiana, for instance, the local Union army authority tells Dr. Ravenel, Lillie's father, to "Select your plantation, my dear sir, and I will see

¹⁹ Colburne's very name seems to suggest the nature of his love: it "burns" like "coal," slowly but with heat. Carter's love for Lillie burns out quickly, and he eventually engages in an adulterous affair. When he dies on the battlefield, Lillie mourns not only his death but her poor choice of husband. Carter's death leaves Lillie sobered yet free to marry Colburne at the war's end. Having experienced the ravages brought on by her temperamental Southern husband, Lillie humbly values her Northern husband's stability. Her altered opinions serve as a metaphor for the greater value Southerners should now have for the Northern way of doing things.

²⁰ In *Race and Reunion*, David Blight explains the process by which two visions of national reunion coalesced into one vision, built on the resurrection of white supremacy, to the exclusion of a third vision that privileged a narrative of racial reunion (2). Novel's like DeForest's capture the ways in which authors early began to push public opinion toward sectional reunion.

that it is assigned to you. You will then obtain your laborers by making written application to the Superintendent of Negro Labor” (DeForest 248). The system implemented by the occupying Union army sounds surprisingly like slavery, with Ravenel choosing his plantation and stocking it with African American laborers, who now receive the consolation of minimal wages. Dr. Ravenel reassures the Union authority that the freedmen “are to receive some remuneration,—not for the bygone centuries of forced labor and oppression,—but for what they will do hereafter” (249). As early as 1867, DeForest dismisses the idea of slave reparations out of hand, in direct contrast to the call for familial reparations Child’s novel seems to demand. Given Ravenel’s flippant attitude about the “centuries of forced labor and oppression” for which former slaves apparently deserve no compensation, the failure of his experiment comes as no surprise.

DeForest pins this failure on the African American workers themselves, rather than Ravenel, their benevolent white employer/master. Ravenel focuses on proving that free blacks could be turned into a valuable labor force—which they had already been, though DeForest fails to acknowledge it—rather than valuable members of the national family. Indeed, DeForest shows little sympathy for former slaves, whom he depicts as “locusts of destruction” descending upon the majestic homes of former masters: they

broke down its doors, shattered its windows, plundered it from parlor to garret, drank themselves drunk on the venerable treasures of the wine closet, and diverted themselves with soiling the carpets, breaking the chairs, ripping up the sofas, and defacing the family portraits [...] To the merely sentimental observer it was sad to think that this house of desolation had not long since been the abode of the generous family life and prodigal hospitality of a southern planter. (253)

The narrator’s closing comment sentimentalizes “the generous family life and prodigal hospitality” of the masters while demonizing the slaves who might otherwise seem justified in releasing their anger toward their former owners upon their masters’ possessions. Instead of

recalling the harsh realities of slavery in this moment, DeForest chooses to dwell upon a romanticized version of white Southern life that passed away with the war. Already DeForest exhibits a tendency to downplay African American experiences for the sake of romanticizing the South and promoting sectional reunion. While moments in the text suggest hope that African Americans might be educated, the novel also collapses that hope. Addressing a slave's moral failings, Dr. Ravenel expresses his disappointment as "I was inclined to hope at one time that I had found an actual Uncle Tom [...] But in hoping a moral miracle I was hoping too much. I ought not to have expected that a St. Vincent de Paul could be raised under the injustice and dissoluteness of the sugar-planting system" (268-269). Ravenel bases his hope for improvement upon a stereotype and feels defeated when his emancipated laborers do not meet these expectations. Moreover, his final claim that he should not expect to find virtue in any slave raised under "injustice and dissoluteness" suggests a deeper conviction that racial uplift may not be possible to the extent he had hoped at the beginning of the experiment. Though the system itself promoted injustice and dissoluteness, when paired with descriptions of former slaves destroying white property, the novel suggests that the "barbarism" of African Americans has less to do with slavery than with inherent nature. When the Ravenels' assigned plantation falls into Confederate hands, Ravenel simply concludes, "My experiment is over. I must get back to New Orleans," unceremoniously leaving his black labor force to fend for themselves at the hands of angry Confederates (344). Contrasted with King's dedication to setting right the wrongs created by slavery, Ravenel's effort at racial uplift seems shallow at best and unsurprisingly falls flat.

DeForest has no intention of and little genuine interest in solving racial tensions in his novel; instead, he turns his attention to reuniting the sections through Colburne's marriage to Lillie. He portrays their marriage as a natural conclusion, claiming, "The man whom she ought

always to have loved, the man whom she now did love with the whole strength of her being, whom she could trust perfectly and forever, had claimed her as his, and she had resigned herself to him” (DeForest 515). This moment of female resignation rehearses the gendered narrative delineated by Silber, but it also portrays this intersectional marriage as a fated coupling that, after having endured trials and tribulations, will stand “forever” in a union of “trust” that “ought always” to have existed. In the end, *Miss Ravenel*’s intersectional marriage plot suggests that the power of the marriage contract to promote sectional unity by maintaining white supremacy began to emerge in full force at this moment of national uncertainty. Child and DeForest’s novels epitomized the contrasting meanings of reunion as the nation plunged into Reconstruction: either a racial reconciliation that would require the reconstruction of white men and ensure access to democratic rights for African Americans, or a sectional unification solidified through the rehabilitation of white privilege. Emerging on the failed side of Reconstruction, the nation had clearly chosen reconciliation around white privilege. As literature of the 1880s demonstrates, the marriage contract reemerged as a vital element in the resuscitation of the white privileges that had been destabilized by the Civil War and Reconstruction. Overcome by myriad voices echoing DeForest’s narrative of reunion, Child’s vision of racial reunion faded quickly and, with it, her constructive interpretation of the intermarriage metaphor and the possibility for white male transformation. Instead of the positive legacy Child intended it to have, the interracial marriage plot would eventually morph into a thematic compliment to the intersectional marriage plot, both coming to support a nation reborn around the concepts of white supremacy. As for the white suitor, while he would become an even more central and sympathetic figure for white writers of the late nineteenth century, no longer would he have the power to bring about racial

reconstruction. Instead, he would become the ostracized victim of a nation desperately clinging to stringent definitions of whiteness.

Chapter 4

Caught in a Bad Romance: Interracial Marriage and the White Male Identity Crisis in *The Chamber over the Gate* and *The Clansman*

Despite the racial alternative Child had offered in *Romance*, subsequent white writers followed in the tradition of intersectional marriage and reunion that promoted the resurrection of white supremacy. Literary productions of the post-Reconstruction decades increasingly reveal a white nation seeking sectional reunion rather than a multi-racial nation seeking reconciliation with its non-white members. As Allen Cerny notes, “American writers, especially southerners, filled national magazines with short fiction that concluded with a marriage symbolizing social and political reconciliation” (Cerny 2). Northern writers reciprocated in kind; “by the late 1880s, northern magazines were filled with ‘sympathetic recognition’ of their former enemy” (9). The intersectional marriage became a popular trope for Northern and Southern writers alike. Whites of both sections expressed a desire for reconciliation, but as historian David Blight has argued, sectional reunion came at the expense of racial reform:

[A]s the sections reconciled, by and large, the races divided. The intersectional wedding that became such a staple of mainstream popular culture, especially in the plantation school of literature, had no interracial counterpart in the popular imagination. Quite the opposite: race was so deeply at the root of the war’s causes and consequences, and so powerful a source of division in American social psychology, that it served as the antithesis of a culture of reconciliation. (4)

Blight’s claim might be clarified by acknowledging that, while interracial marriages existed in postwar fiction, such plots did not act as counterparts to the intersectional wedding in the sense that they did not promote racial over sectional reunion. In order for sectional reunion to succeed, the racial underpinnings of the war had to be obscured, a phenomenon reflected, according to Blight, in literature by the popularity of intersectional marriages versus the lack of an “interracial

counterpart in popular imagination.” Lydia Maria Child aside, Blight correctly notes that postwar novelists did not embrace the interracial wedding as an emblem of a nation united as they did the intersectional wedding. However, to say that intersectional marriage plots “had no interracial counterpart” is to ignore the proliferation of such plots in the postbellum period.¹ Interracial marriage plots reemerged, perhaps even more ubiquitously, after the Civil War, but these narratives served a different purpose than their antebellum counterparts.

These plots worked in conjunction with the North-South marriage plot to promote sectional reunion around the maintenance of white male privilege and a white national identity. If the question of what to do with newly freed African Americans prolonged division in the recovering nation, then the question of whiteness and the maintenance of its power and privilege provided a point around which both sections potentially could rally. This sort of reunion required the creation of a monolithic white masculinity to which all white men would have to adhere. As Kim Magowan writes, “Nothing is more central to white supremacy than the notion of identity being fixed and stable,” yet postwar masculinity was anything but stable, a problem that precipitated individual and national identity crises (99). “This crisis in white male identity,” Magowan claims, “is triggered by miscegenation” (79). Postbellum intermarriage narratives arguably gained popularity because they captured this identity crisis, providing sites in which to fictionally resolve the crisis and reestablish a sense of stability. The resurgence of this type of

¹ Blight understandably overlooks Margaret Homes Bates’s novel because it has failed to enter the canon of nineteenth-century American literature. His failure to take into account Lydia Maria Child’s *Romance of the Republic*, William Dean Howells’s *An Imperative Duty*, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper’s *Iola Leroy*, and Charles Chesnut’s *The House behind the Cedars*, not to mention Dixon’s famous *Clansman*, among others, seems less excusable from a literary perspective. From a historical perspective, Blight’s omission may be justified since none of these novels, with the exception perhaps of *Imperative Duty*, garnered a mainstream reading audience. The existence and proliferation of these plots suggests that authors were still conceptualizing race relations through forbidden intermarriages, but intermarriages do not suggest a postbellum interracial reunion. Instead, they often form a threat to reunion.

fiction, especially by white authors, followed the establishment of stricter miscegenation laws.² Miscegenation laws formed, according to Peggy Pascoe, “the foundation for the larger racial projects of white supremacy and white purity” by providing, I would add, a stable basis for identity: “white” men were men who married white women (6). In other words, white men maintained the stability of their identity through the marriage contract. Interracial marriage narratives likewise worked to promote white commitment to these values by reintroducing the marriage contract as a basis for white male privileges. Instead of a racial reunion, intermarriage texts illustrate the personal and national identity crises pursuant upon the blurring of the color line, warning white readers of the need to maintain this line at whatever cost. In postwar narratives of interracial marriage, deviant white men become more suspect and dangerous to the nation than the mulatta.

Margaret Holmes Bates gained acclaim for her 1886 novel, *The Chamber over the Gate*, in which she uses an accidental interracial marriage to provoke her white male protagonist’s identity crisis (Willard and Livermore 64). Stephen Gatsimer, a principle protagonist in *Chamber*, has unintentionally violated the marriage contract by wedding a former slave. Throughout the novel, he struggles to reconcile white male norms with his own marriage mistake that produced a child of mixed race (Bates 8). The story initially reads like a narrative of sectional reunion: Union doctor rescues desolate Southern belle from the ravages of the Civil War, marries her, and brings her North. This narrative unravels, however, when Bates reveals her

² “Miscegenation,” Eva Saks explains, “was a topic to which legislators paid increasing attention in the nineteenth century. This attention was heightened in mid-century, from 1840 through Reconstruction” (64-65). She clarifies that just because “legislators and judges paid increasing attention to the regulation and punishment of miscegenation at this time does not mean that interracial sex and marriage as social practices increased in frequency; the centrality of these practices to legal discourse was instead a sign that their relation to power was changing” (65). In other words, white supremacy increasingly saw these laws as a means of solidifying its control over the nation at a moment when centralized white authority was being severely challenged.

intersectional marriage to be an interracial marriage as well. At stake in the novel is the meaning of reunion, and its definition lies in Stephen's hands. Though his wife dies prematurely after the birth of their still-born second child, his first-born daughter survives. Much of Stephen's identity crisis unfolds around his relationship to Coral, the mixed-race daughter for whom he now feels a responsibility to provide. Stephen struggles to decide what matters more to him—Coral's future marital happiness or the purity of white heritage and the white supremacy this "purity" makes possible. While caught in this dilemma, Stephen finds himself cast into a liminal space, unable to claim the political privileges of white masculinity once his own commitment to white supremacy comes under scrutiny after violating the marriage contract. Stephen's redemption and sectional reunion in *Chamber* take place when Stephen sacrifices Coral's future to thwart the threat of her interracial, incestuous marriage, thereby reinstating the marriage contract and breaking the miscegenous cycle he unintentionally helped to perpetuate. The novel captures the post-reconstruction crisis of a nation struggling to vindicate its continued self-identification as a white man's nation that did little more than make symbolic gestures of assistance toward emancipated African Americans.

Bates's Indiana-based narrative has been long forgotten by scholars but deserves to be studied alongside more prominent interracial marriage fictions because of the way it invokes and begins to rewrite the popular antebellum tragic mulatta plot to serve the needs of white supremacy. This chapter fills a gap in nineteenth-century scholarship by reintroducing a popular novel from the 1880s that reworks the interracial marriage tropes established by Child. Rather than a deceitful white man who seduces a helpless slave woman and tragically abandons her, *Chamber* presents the story of a white man seduced by the passing woman's charms and rendered tragic by his inability to read race in the postwar United States. In the post-

emancipation period, when the erasure of slavery left race boundaries porous and uncertain, as Child positively noted in 1867, Bates returns to the intermarriage plot to assert the need to reinstate and police those boundaries if white men expect to maintain their privileges and whites their dominance. She draws heavily on elements of the antebellum tragic mulatta plot, imagining her intermarriage as a coupling between a white man and a mixed-race woman and depicting the woman as somewhat tragic in her own right as the abandoned daughter of her former master. However, Bates does not encourage readers to sympathize with the mulatta character as the primary victim in the novel, as antebellum authors do.³ Her narrative shifts the tragedy onto the duped white suitor, asking readers to sympathize with Stephen, whose dawning knowledge of his wife's race leaves "an ineffaceable stain in his thought" and on his life (Howells, "Editor's Study" 828). These pleas for sympathy on Stephen's behalf do not excuse him from having to choose between his daughter's private interests and his support for the national project of reinstating white supremacy after the war. Bates forces Stephen to choose, but she uses sympathy for Stephen to draw attention away from the African American figures in the novel and to enforce the power of the white male reunion that finally proves to be Stephen's redemption.

Through Stephen's identity crisis, punishment, and eventual redemption, Bates presents the image of a unified nation standing strong through the enforcement of the marriage contract against the emancipated, African-American presence, which, according to paranoid whites,

³ While her attitude toward the white suitor and his plight comes across clearly in the novel, Bates's attitude toward the three generations of mixed-raced women is more nuanced. June, Stephen's mother-in-law, draws very little sympathy from other characters in the novel and is considered the source of Stephen's misfortune. Stephen does at last admit that June's deception was not a malicious act but, rather, a misguided effort to provide her daughter with a better life. Her daughter, Stephen's wife, draws slightly more sympathy and is spoken of as beautiful and kind by most of the other characters, though she is blamed for being party to June's deception and Stephen's misfortune. Coral, the furthest removed from black ancestry, receives a great deal of sympathy and compassion from both Stephen and his sister, Letty. Perhaps because Coral is the whitest of the three mulattas and the only one not involved in the intentional deception of a white man, Bates herself seems torn about Coral's final marginalization that atones for her father's mistake. Though she may encourage readers to sympathize with Coral in her tragic fate, Bates never criticizes Stephen for forcing this end upon Coral. He remains infallible in his decision to isolate Coral.

sought to infiltrate white America by marrying unsuspecting whites. White men across sections reunite to exclude the mixed-race woman. Rather than offering cross-racial romances as symbols of black-white union in the postwar period, Bates's interracial marriage plot acts as a cautionary tale, serving to warn white readers of the consequences of intermarriage for the individual and potentially for the nation.⁴ According to Eva Saks, during the mid to late nineteenth century, a "recurrent theme" in white American fears emerged: "the nation, in its socio-political identity, was becoming 'miscegenous'" (78). The "national body was explicitly conceived as a white body" in these formulations "while blacks were portrayed in a simile as the fraction of polluting blood within this body, an unassimilable *clot* in the national body and the white family" (78). White-authored texts use the danger of intermarriage and the spread of this imagined racial infection as a unifying threat common to both North and South alike. The white suitor in Bates's novel embarks on a mission to cure the "national body and the white family" of the black disease he has unintentionally introduced into it. Instead of acting as a "source of division in American social psychology," the impending threat of race mixing in postwar white-authored novels offers a vision of reconciliation and a solution to the white nation's racial and sectional identity crisis founded upon the rehabilitation and protection of white privilege.

Nowhere does this mission to reconcile the sections around white privilege and the rehabilitation of a white national body become clearer than in Thomas Dixon Jr.'s 1905 novel, *The Clansman*. Dixon had risen to popularity during the late 1880s when, as a Baptist minister in Boston, he became known as the "defender of the white man's South," a stance that Michele Gillespie and Randal Hall say "only served to make him more attractive to northern

⁴ Aside from the white man's loss of privilege, Stephen's stillborn black son reflects one of the primary white fears surrounding miscegenation: atavism, or reversion to the ancestral African type.

congregations at a time when white Americans had begun to heal wounds of the Civil War by closing ranks on racial matters” (5). Through the white suitor, Dixon recreates the national identity crisis immediately following the Civil War when the potential for racial reconciliation vied with the hope of sectional reunion, a struggle he metaphorizes as an interracial relationship that threatens the wellbeing of the nation and an intersectional marriage that heals the North-South breach. These dueling intersectional and interracial marriage plots combine John DeForest and Lydia Maria Child’s visions of reunion and return to the moment when either path seemed possible. Interracial love in *The Clansman* transforms into an almost mesmeric power the mulatta mistress, Lydia Brown, holds over her employer, Austin Stoneman. Though ostensibly Stoneman’s housekeeper, Brown keeps Stoneman in her thrall, leading to a relationship more akin to that of common law husband and wife than that of employer and employee. So deep is Dixon’s aversion to giving legitimacy to interracial relationships that, while he names Brown the “first lady of the land” after Stoneman’s ascension to political dominance, he never labels Stoneman and Brown’s relationship a marriage of any kind (90).⁵ Refusing to countenance the relationship as legitimate in any sense heightens the deviance of this white suitor. Dixon portrays Brown’s influence as the unknown reason behind Stoneman’s push for legislation promoting civil rights and racial equality. Brown pollutes the senator’s mind, controlling his political decisions and consequently infecting the entire nation with her black presence. The novel links interracial relationships to national consequences in an immediate way by suggesting that a black woman can gain vicarious citizenship rights through her white lover. Dixon attacks Stoneman as a dangerous legislator whose interracial relationship violates the marriage contract and threatens

⁵ In this regard, Dixon differs from the other authors in this project, who either state explicitly that their couples consider themselves married or allow their couples to legally marry within the text. Dixon’s references to Brown as the “first lady of the land” do suggest more than a mistress relationship, however, which is why I choose to include Dixon in this chapter.

the nation. White supremacy triumphs only when Stoneman relinquishes his political power, admits his wrong-doing, and permits his daughter's marriage to the Southern hero.

My analysis of Stoneman and his interracial marriage builds on recent work by Tara Bynum. Bynum begins to “redirect scholarly attention away from Dixon’s obvious anxieties about the preservation of southern womanhood and the threat of the black male rapist toward [...] the shadowy and pervasive influence of black and/or mulatto women on the political development” of the nation that Dixon reconstructs in the novel (248). Her analysis lays an important foundation for reading the character of the often-overlooked mulatta housekeeper and calls much needed attention to Brown’s quasi-marital relationship to Stoneman. Brown plays an key role as the gatekeeper to Stoneman’s home, “the Mecca of the party in power and the storm-centre of the forces destined to shape the Nation’s life,” yet scholars have largely glossed over her and the significance of her relationship to Stoneman (Dixon 91). Instead of Stoneman himself at the center of these “forces,” Bynum argues that it is Brown whose “household governance regulates the manner and sensibilities of Austin Stoneman” (Bynum 254). Through her influence over Stoneman, Brown gains the ability to “shape the Nation’s life,” leading Bynum to conclude that “Lydia Brown serves as a warning against that emergent discourse of black women, which calls attention to the political work of the black woman—a work that must and could potentially disrupt the foundation of the racist society that Dixon is attempting to construct and maintain” (261). I add to this fear of the empowered black woman Dixon’s fear of the deviant white man. Equally destructive as the empowered mulatta to the racist foundation Dixon seeks to fortify is the white man who claims the privileges of whiteness without fulfilling the associated responsibilities. Unlike Stephen, Stoneman never legally marries the mixed-race woman, but he cannot plead ignorance of her racial background, as Stephen can. The ill-hidden

secrecy of the relationship as well as Stoneman's awareness of participating in a cultural taboo suggest the doubly illicit nature of his connection to Lydia Brown. Stoneman shamelessly exercises his political rights while elevating his black mistress to the position of first lady in his own household and eventually the nation (Dixon 91). Together, the malicious mulatta and her deviant white suitor threaten white supremacy in postbellum America. Stoneman's relationship with Brown warns white readers to remain vigilant not simply in their policings of blackness but in their policings of whiteness as well. By calling attention to the role of the mulatta, Bynum opens the door for readings of *The Clansman* as an interracial marriage narrative that unexpectedly follows in the tradition of black and white antebellum abolitionists.

These postbellum narratives invert the victim-victimizer relationship: the white man now becomes the victim of the mixed-race woman who fails to disclose the "truth" of her racial ancestry before their marriage. Even Stoneman, portrayed by Dixon as a vicious opponent to white supremacy, eventually confesses that he, and consequently the nation, has been the victim of the mulatta woman's wiles. Just as anti-abolitionists had used interracial marriage to generate fear of and opposition to emancipation, postwar white authors turned to interracial marriage plots to instill in fellow white readers the need to connect democratic rights once more to the marriage contract. Bates's novel captures the postbellum effort to reconstruct a national identity of whiteness through the marriage contract and thereby prepares the way for Dixon's 1905 novel, *The Clansman*, in which the reassertion of the marriage contract proves to be the national antidote to the poison of intermarriage and Reconstruction. Reunion in both novels finally occurs when the white men atone for their marital mistakes and pave the way for the reinstatement of the marriage contract in the next generation.

"This is a White Man's Country," "Draw the Color Line There"

Because the name Margaret Holmes Bates is all but entirely unfamiliar to modern literary scholars, I provide a brief biography here. Debra Rosenthal, the only other scholar who mentions Bates, notes that Bates “was a well-known and prolific writer” in her own time, though “today her books are forgotten” (499).⁶ Born to the Ernsperger family in Fremont, Ohio in 1844, Bates moved with her family to Indiana in 1858 and settled in Indianapolis after her marriage to Charles Bates in 1865 (Moulton 173). Research suggests that Bates likely had an unhappy marriage that ended in separation. In a 1940s biography, R. E. Banta places Bates in New York for the remainder of her life after leaving Indianapolis at an unstated date. A *New York Times* article from March 5, 1909 quotes Bates at a Legislative League meeting as declaring, “They say the only good Indian is a dead one, and I think that is about the way it is with the men” (*New York Times* 1909). An article from the October 11, 1914 *Indianapolis Star* cites Charles Bates as having committed suicide. Though he “is survived by his widow and son,” the article goes on to say that they live in New York, and only the son will return for the funeral (*Indianapolis Star* 1914). No evidence remains to suggest why the marriage failed, but unhappy marriages recur as themes throughout *Chamber*, hinting at the Bateses marital unhappiness even in the 1880s.

Most of the surviving biographical information about Bates stems from contemporary assessments of her literary productions. She gained national attention as a novelist in 1881 for her first book, *Manitou*, a novel about the Native-American legends told about an Indiana lake of

⁶ Rosenthal provides no biographical information about Bates and no real summary of the novel’s plot. Her brief references to the plot of the novel suggest that she has misread it, leading her to conclude that the novel focuses on the tragic mulatta’s plight after discovering her heritage rather than the white suitor’s struggle to reconcile his white identity with his marital and familial relationships to blackness. She includes Bates’s novel in her essay primarily to “construct a literary genealogy for *An Imperative Duty* that situates Howells in the middle of a call-and-response literary conversation with popular women writers about race, gender, and genre,” not to offer an analysis of *Chamber* itself (497). I have been unable to find any other scholarly references to Bates or her novels, though I have managed to find several contemporary sources that praise her skill as a writer. Rosenthal’s bibliography likewise provides no references to scholarly works about Bates. In this chapter, I attempt to begin a scholarly interest in Bates and offer a reading of her novel that includes her within the larger tradition of intermarriage fiction traced throughout the dissertation.

the same name. Though, as Charles Moulton writes, she also “has rare powers as a poet, some of her poems having attracted wide attention,” Bates achieved her biggest literary success with the publication of *The Chamber over the Gate* (Banta 18, Moulton 174). Frances Willard and Mary Livermore, who considered Bates important enough to include in their 1897 compilation of American women’s biographies, comment that *The Chamber over the Gate* “has had a wide sale” (64). By far the most ubiquitously mentioned of her many works, *The Chamber over the Gate* received praise from William Dean Howells for its “verisimilitude” and “simple directness” that create a “living community” within the novel (*Editor’s Study* 827). Though he claims that the “question of heredity solves itself with regard to the slave mother’s child too melodramatically, too helplessly,” Howells concludes that “anyone who reads *The Chamber over the Gate* will wish to see whatever Margaret Holmes may write hereafter” (827).⁷ Bates continued to be a prolific writer throughout her life, though none of her subsequent productions received the praise she garnered with *Chamber*.

Whereas Howells looks for resolution of the heredity plotline in the “slave mother’s child,” Coral, I argue that Bates is less interested in the questions of heredity and atavism raised by Coral’s existence than the identity crisis her existence provokes in her white father, Dr. Stephen Gatsimer. Throughout the novel, Stephen finds himself caught between a love for his mixed-race daughter and a pride in his family’s untainted European ancestry. The slave mother and her child exist in *Chamber* not as protagonists but as catalysts that initiate and perpetuate Stephen’s fraught relationship to whiteness, provoking questions about how the white man who has come into intimate contact with the racial other relates to “the color line” and the “white

⁷ Bates published *The Chamber over the Gate* under the name of Margaret Holmes, possibly because her husband held the copyright and might have paid to have the novel printed.

man's country" at large. Moulton, in his brief biological sketch of her in the 1891 *Magazine of Poetry: A Quarterly Review*, describes Margaret Holmes Bates's family as just "the kind of people that Mrs. Bates makes the Gatsimers in her novel, *The Chamber over the Gate*—meditative, managing, and clannish," deeply proud of their "purely German" ancestry (173). Drawing from her own family experience, Bates makes the Gatsimers and their race pride the subject of her study, not the mulattas to whom Howells looks for resolution of the intermarriage plot. Stephen in particular finds "never-failing themes of admiration" in the Gatsimers' "fair, transparent complexions that he'd declare over and over no amount of Indiana malaria could tinge with yellow" (Bates 9). That the Gatsimers remain untinged by the "yellow" of malaria suggests that they are also untainted by the African blood that would yellow their "fair, transparent complexions" and supposedly make them susceptible to tropical diseases, such as malaria. To his mortification, Stephen has yellowed the family line by marrying a former slave woman passing for white, only realizing his misfortune when their second child is born black. When the novel begins, both Stephen's wife and second child have died, but his first child, the white-appearing Coral, lives as a constant external reminder of the stigma Stephen has internalized.

Though modern readers might interpret the slave master as the real culprit behind Stephen's tragedy, this is not a novel concerned with indicting the sins of the white fathers; Bates instead focuses on the "sins" of the mixed-race mothers, June and her daughter, who practice deceit upon their white liberator. Accordingly, she does not question the role of the slaveholders, whose generations of profligacy led to the creation of white slaves. Colonel Burkwalter enters the story only long enough for readers to know that he "seen fur enough ahed to send [his] women an' children to Europe" before the war broke out, leaving behind his illegitimate slave

daughter and her mother June. Aunt Hester, who narrates the story to Letty, passes no judgment on Burkwalter's actions, either in fathering an illegitimate child or in abandoning her. If anything, she mildly praises him for having "seen fur enough ahead" to protect his legitimate white family.⁸ The Northern liberator, too, remains blameless in Hester's eyes, even if he is divinely punished for his marital blunder. "Stephen didn't do anything wrong," Hester explains, "It was a mistake, an' the good Lord hain't never seemed to provide no way out of mistakes" (74). Whereas Stephen has made only a "mistake," June and her daughter have committed outright sin in their efforts to cross the color line. When Stephen meets June's daughter while serving as a Union doctor in the South, June deceptively introduces the girl as Burkwalter's oldest daughter, encouraging Stephen to believe her a white woman. Stephen impulsively marries her and brings her north after the war, never suspecting his wife's race until their second child is born black. On her deathbed, Stephen's wife confesses to having passed for white and exclaims, "Mammy June, I tole you it was wicked; don't you know I tole you so? See, our sin hes foun' us out" (80).⁹ Her confession of "sin" points to her "white" lie in choosing to pass and her willingness to deceive Stephen into committing miscegenation. The bulk of the blame, however, falls on June, the blackest of the three mulatta generations depicted. June hatches the scheme, convinces her daughter to pass as white, and encourages Stephen to marry her. Stephen's suffering, and Coral's later marginalization, stems from June's misguided efforts to provide a better future for her daughter.

⁸ Later in the novel, when a Percy Langdon appears and requests Stephen's permission to marry Coral, references to Burkwalter resurface because the suitor turns out to be Burkwalter's son and therefore Coral's half uncle. As Stephen reveals the tragedy of his life and the reason why Percy cannot marry Coral, Percy imagines that Stephen's eyes "were accusing him of his father's sin" (329). None of the other characters blame Burkwalter instead of June, however.

⁹ Stephen's Aunt Hester, who speaks in what I can best identify as a rural Indiana dialect, tells Letty the story of his marriage. Readers can assume that Stephen's wife did not speak in black dialect as June does. If so, Stephen would likely have known her race by her dialect.

Portrayed as a victim of African American trickery, Stephen nonetheless suffers for his marital mistake as he tries to reconcile his duty to his mixed-race daughter with his duty as a white man. Singleness becomes one of Stephen's self-inflicted punishments as well as a solution to his dilemma. Though Hester "wish[es] that Stephen'd conclude to marry again" because it "[s]eems like it's a pity a young, good looking man like him should be livin' alone," she deems it unlikely as "long's Coral lives, 't any rate" (72). By refusing to remarry, Stephen protects Coral from an unkind stepmother who might discover and exploit the secret of Coral's race just as much as it protects a subsequent white bride from sharing in Stephen's contamination by connection to an African American. Remaining single allows Stephen to do his duty as a father and as a white man, but it also means that Stephen exists in a liminal space along with his not-quite-white daughter, himself cut off from one of the main privileges of white masculinity—legal marriage to a white woman. Without remarrying, Stephen has no white heir to carry on his prized Gatsimer traits or to inherit his property. More importantly, the goal of reclaiming white male privilege becomes inaccessible forever.

Inhabiting this liminal space of identity means the unexpected loss of Stephen's privileges as a white man, including not only his right to marry a white woman but, most importantly, his political rights. Popular in his hometown for his war service as well as his skill as a physician, Stephen expects to receive and accept the Republican nomination for representative to the Indiana state house. Moments before he leaves for the convention, however, an anonymous letter arrives, the contents of which blackmail Stephen into declining the nomination. Claiming knowledge of Stephen's interracial marriage, the letter writer demands that Stephen "[l]eave our state legislature to be filled by honest party men who have lived up to their principles so far as to associate with, or at least to marry, white women. This is a white

man's country" (138). The letter writer implies that Stephen is not an "honest party" man because he refuses to publicize the details of his first marriage, instead allowing voters to think he has fulfilled his responsibilities as a white man. The "principles" of a "white man's country" require political figures to maintain the boundaries of white supremacy by restricting their legal marriages to white female partners, despite who they might "associate with" off the record. Such language leaves open the white male privilege of keeping African American mistresses while enjoying the legitimacy gained by marriage to a white woman. The writer connects Stephen's fitness for public office with his marital choice, deeming Stephen unworthy of nomination because he has not fulfilled his duty to the nation by marrying a white woman. Though continually referred to as a mistake by the characters who know of it, Stephen's marriage nevertheless disqualifies him from political service.

As the letter writer makes clear, Stephen's proximity to non-whites unfits him for the task of protecting the interests of a white nation. Included in the anonymous note, Stephen finds a mock-up notice that the writer threatens to post throughout the county should Stephen accept the nomination. The notice reads:

ATTENTION VOTERS!

Dr. Gatsimer married Coral, the octoroon daughter of James Burkwalter, a colonel in the Confederate army. His mother-in-law, June, lives with him. The second child of this marriage, a son, inherited strongly from his mother's slave relations, and was as black as the devil is painted. Draw the color line there. Down with the darkey! and down, lower still, with the miscegenationist! (139)

In this notice meant to destroy Stephen's credibility as a white man with voters, the writer dwells on Stephen's familial connections to an "octoroon" wife, a live-in black mother-in-law, and a son "as black as the devil is painted," all of which is intended to mark Stephen as non-white by

association.¹⁰ However, Stephen's chief crime lies in his failure to "draw the color line" correctly. Instead, Stephen dangerously blurs the color line through his connection to these dark family members. Worse still, through his intended acceptance of the nomination to the state house, Stephen potentially threatens to connect the interests of the "darkey" to the nation as the representative not only of the white inhabitants of Fairview but of his own African-American family members. The familial relations of the "miscegenationist" call into question his loyalties to the white supremacist agenda. Consequently, the writer encourages his fellow white men to "draw the color line there" by rejecting not only the "darkey" but also the man who takes the "darkey" into his family. According to the sender, the continued whiteness of the nation depends upon excluding the body marked by African-American heritage as well as the man who has known too great an intimacy with that body. The project of rehabilitating postbellum white supremacy relies on maintaining, through whatever means necessary, the color line; the maintenance of this line requires the exclusion of nonwhites and white men, like Stephen, who fail to read race well enough to "know" white from black.

Fearing for Coral's happiness and safety should the blackmailer make the truth of her mother's heritage widely known, Stephen declines the nomination, but the language of his refusal suggests that Stephen himself has doubts about his fitness for office after having engaged in an interracial marriage. The blackmail incident unleashes Stephen's identity crisis by directly impugning his whiteness and his dedication to national ideals versus personal interests. Goaded into a murderous rage by "this anonymous coward," Stephen proclaims his intent to murder the

¹⁰ Towards the end of the novel, readers learn that Stephen's life has indeed been destroyed by his familial connections, though not necessarily the black ones. His nefarious brother Hugh is responsible for penning and sending the letter as a scheme to ensure that Stephen remains in Fairview. Hugh, despite his white, Gatsimer blood, turns out to be the true villain of the novel. This fact undercuts the force of the letter somewhat, but that Hugh succeeds in blackmailing Stephen with the threat of exposing the truth of his marriage suggests that white voters would likely respond as Hugh has calculated: by rejecting Stephen's candidacy.

writer, should he ever discover the perpetrator, and his willingness to commit “a thousand such murders, if need be, to protect me and mine” (140, 141). Stephen’s first impulse is to protect Coral from a truth that can only hurt her. His loyalty, then, is first to “me and mine,” but an uncertainty about his own relationship to the white nation undergirds his noble desire to protect Coral by acceding to the blackmailer’s demands. Delivering his apology speech at the convention, Stephen declares “he was doing what was best for them by declining the honor they were so ready to give him” (133). Though clearly angered by the sender’s malicious intent, Stephen acknowledges that he would understand “If the man had come to me openly and honestly” to voice his concerns about Stephen’s past (140). Not insensible to the doubts and fears knowing parties might harbor about his commitment to white supremacy as a result of his interracial marriage, Stephen admits to “doing what was best” not only for himself and his daughter but for the white male constituency he would represent. His response to the blackmail threat proves that he would fight fiercely to protect Coral, even as he recognizes that his connection to her threatens his own privileges as a white man. However, he also expresses a desire to defend the whiteness of the national family against the threat of racial contamination in a way that he failed to protect the proud Gatsimer clan. Bates implies that these impulses contradict each other and consequently leave Stephen struggling to decide where his primary loyalties lie: with his mixed-race daughter or with “a white man’s country.”

For Stephen to resolve the identity crisis caused by these contending loyalties and earn redemption as a white man in the novel, he must reinstate the color line he has blurred and thereby prove his dedication to the project of keeping the nation white. The necessary sacrifice is his own child. Stephen recognizes this, concluding, “As for Coral marrying, of course that can never be” (142). Without “any idea how many generations would suffice to obliterate the taint of

Negro blood,” Stephen fears what might happen should he allow her to marry and produce children. Not only would he jeopardize another white man’s future in allowing him to marry Coral; he would also suffer the shame of perpetuating the racial taint he has brought upon the Gatsimer traits through his wife’s supposedly inferior heredity. Unwilling to risk Coral marrying and giving birth to a black child as her mother did, Stephen contemplates “which would be better for her, a coffin or a nunnery” (142). Celibacy, isolation, and death seem to be the only future Stephen imagines for Coral, yet they are also the fate Stephen accepts for himself. Having already eschewed marriage and given up his chances at political success, Stephen sacrifices his own future to take care of Coral and to ensure that she will not be connected to other whites through him. Stephen, forever the martyr in Bates’s novel, refuses to sacrifice the nation’s white ideals for his own happiness or that of his daughter. Indeed, Stephen’s name calls to mind the Biblical Stephen, considered the first martyr for the Christian faith. Bates intends for readers to think of Stephen as a martyr for a sacred cause that goes unstated in the novel but can best be understood as the preservation of racial purity. Coral’s white-appearing, mixed-race body represents a form of rebellion against and threat to the white national body. Stephen’s task in the novel is to bring Coral’s mixed-race body into submission by forcing a life of singleness upon her. Bates means for readers to admire Stephen’s scrupulous devotion to maintaining white supremacy, even at his daughter’s expense.

In the final moments before Stephen must reveal to Coral her black heritage, Bates portrays him as the ultimate of suffering saints, Jesus Christ. Despite claiming that it is his responsibility to tell Coral of her heritage and impress upon her the duty she has to remain separate from white America, Stephen delays to do so until Coral has attracted a white suitor. The interests of the nation and the interests of his daughter do not overlap in this instance, as

they did in his decision to decline the Republican nomination, and Stephen finds that he must sacrifice either his white ideals or his daughter's future. "Knowing what he knew" of her racial heritage, Stephen questions whether he could "allow her to tamper with the law—the law that determines unto the third and fourth and even later generations" (332). Initially readers might think that Stephen struggles with miscegenation laws that prevent Coral from marrying a white man, but his reference to the "third and fourth" generations suggests that it is divine law with which Coral tampers. In Exodus 34:7, God speaks to Israel, warning them that He will "visit[] the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."¹¹ Coral must pay for the sins of her mother and grandmother; however, in Bates's Christ metaphor, it is Stephen who serves as the divinely appointed sacrifice. Like Christ, "he had come to Gethsemane. The night was upon him, his friends were asleep, the cup was in his hand, he could not put it by" (332-333). Just as Christ in Gethsemane struggled to accept the mission of self-sacrifice assigned to him, Stephen must decide if he will go through with the sacrifice that will wash away the sins of the mothers or if he will allow (white) mankind to be damned by unknown acts of miscegenation (332). Bates transposes this moment into a spiritual battle in which Stephen acts as the Christ figure who sacrifices himself for the salvation of many white men to come.

The scriptural references Bates invokes at this moment somewhat contradict each other. While the most sustained of these metaphors is the Stephen/Christ comparison, Stephen also pauses before his discussion with Coral to ask himself, "Did Jephthah feel like this?" (333). Judges 11 relates the story of Jephthah, the son of a prostitute. Driven out and disinherited by his

¹¹ Percy does imagine Burkwalter's sin as motivating Stephen's tragedy, but Stephen never does. This discrepancy leaves some confusion as to whether Coral pays for the sins of her foremothers, forefathers, or both. From Stephen's perspective, which never considers Burkwalter, it seems more likely that he imagines Coral as paying for the sins of her foremothers.

brothers, Jephthah rises to be a heroic figure in Israel after defeating the Ammonites. In his desire for victory, he foolishly vows, “whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD’s, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering” (Judges 11:30-31). Upon his safe return, his daughter rushes from the house singing praises to God, but her praise turns to sorrow when Jephthah informs her of his vow. Nevertheless, both she and her father willingly “carried out his vow with her which he had vowed. She knew no man” though “she was his only child” (11:39, 34). Jephthah’s daughter suffers a life of secluded celibacy for her father’s unthinking rashness, and Jephthah’s line ends with this daughter. In this metaphor, Stephen is less a savior than a rash conqueror who fails to pause and consider the full extent of his actions before it is too late. The sin rests on Stephen, as it does on Jephthah, and the daughters serve as the innocent sacrifices that cover their father’s sins. These mixed metaphors reveal Bates’s own struggle to determine whether Stephen is a sinner in need of redemption or a savior capable of rescuing other white men from the sin of miscegenation.¹²

As if to reinforce the necessity of the sacrifice Stephen must make in excluding his mixed-race daughter from a white future, Bates combines miscegenation with another taboo: incest. The son of a wealthy planter, white suitor Percy Langdon reveals himself to be in fact Percy Burkwalter.¹³ Stephen quickly realizes that Coral’s suitor is actually her mother’s half-brother. At this juncture, Stephen faces the opportunity for a sort of revenge upon the Southern patriarch who made Stephen’s downfall possible: allowing Percy and Coral to marry would not simply be an act of miscegenation but of incest as well. However, Stephen never sees Burkwalter

¹² Regardless of the metaphor invoked for Stephen, Coral remains an innocent victim, suggesting that Bates herself regrets Coral’s fate.

¹³ After his father’s death during the war and his family’s subsequent destitution, Percy accepts his bachelor uncle’s offer to adopt him as heir under the condition that he take his uncle’s surname, thus leading to the confusion.

as the progenitor of his own misfortune and so never considers revenge necessary. Instead, he claims, “I married, in ignorance, Colonel Burkwalter’s slave daughter, as I might allow some other man to marry your slave-woman’s granddaughter” (329). Stephen sees it as his responsibility to dispel Percy’s ignorance of Coral’s race as well as her familial relation to him, but in doing so, he also symbolically rights the wrong done to him by June, who did allow him to marry in ignorance. Stephen’s words are a warning to other white men about the danger of ignorance when it comes to a potential marriage partner’s family background. Ignorance threatens to make possible the dual crimes of miscegenation and incest. Linking miscegenation to incest in the novel serves as a means of circumventing the possibility that Percy might not care about Coral’s ancestry; the incest motif makes their marriage doubly impossible.

A more sinister reading lurks under Bates’s connection of miscegenation with incest. Because interracial liaisons and the offspring of those relationships so often went uncountenanced by white families, miscegenation carried the added danger of giving birth to incest. Saks illuminates the connection between incest and miscegenation to reveal how American law frequently equated the two: “The taboo of too different (amalgamation/miscegenation) is interchangeable with the taboo of too similar (incest), since both crimes rely on a pair of bodies which are mutually constitutive of each other’s deviance” (71). Coral’s tragedy lies in her paradoxical status as too different yet too similar. Stephen’s role is to police her relationship to white male bodies as well as the national body, ensuring that she does not become “constitutive of [either’s] deviance.” Though he later comforts his devastated daughter, assuring her, “What would I not do to save you, darling,” it is clear what Stephen will not do to save Coral: deceive a white man and perpetuate “deviance” (336). Much as he professes to love Coral, his love of white supremacy triumphs when he refuses to allow Percy to proceed with his

courtship in ignorance of Coral's heritage. The threat of incest only makes it more imperative for Stephen to stop the budding relationship. Stephen neutralizes the threat to the system of white supremacy by reinstating the color line with Coral on the other side.¹⁴

Stephen's decision to sacrifice Coral's chance at happiness paves the way for a type of reunion in the novel. The trouble that started with Stephen's trip South during the Civil War ends with the Southern suitor's trip North as white men across sections unite to exclude the mixed-race woman. Rosenthal, in her brief references to the plot of the novel, seems to misread the ending of this plotline when she claims that Bates restores "black family ties" at the end of the novel (509). As Stephen's sacrifice suggests, Bates achieves white male reunion by denying the black family ties that might give Coral a future in Bates's fictional community. Burdened with knowledge of her black heritage, Coral nevertheless cannot pursue a life as a black woman without exposing her father's secret familial connection to the African American community, thus casting his white identity into public doubt. Neither, however, can she claim a future within white society, for the sacrifice of her future as a white woman atones for Stephen's mistake in crossing the color line by reinstating that line. Unable to lay claim to a black or white identity, Coral finds no place for herself in the Fairview community, and she slowly fades from existence. After the revelation of her heritage, she appears only once more in the novel, though nearly three hundred pages remain and her father continues to play a central role in the remaining plotline.

¹⁴ Ironically, reinstating the color line requires Stephen to redraw family boundaries to include the nonwhite family members that Burkwalter attempts to deny when he leaves them behind during the war. While Coral is excluded from whiteness, she is now recognized as Burkwalter's granddaughter and Percy's niece. As Rafia Zafar pointed out in her comments, this family relationship opens the possibility of an alternate future for Coral when Percy offers to escort her on a visit to Boston, a hope that never materializes in the novel (Rafia Zafar, Personal Communication 3 June 2015). I argue that this visit never occurs for two reasons, the first being that Coral is no longer necessary to the novel after Stephen's redemption. Bates's interest in Coral lies not in her potential as a character but in her significance to Stephen's dilemma. Once this dilemma is resolved, Bates herself has no interest in providing Coral with a future. Moreover, to open the possibility of Coral finding a husband in Boston is to perpetuate Stephen's crisis. Stephen does not want simply to prevent incest or another white man's deception; he wants to prevent the future existence of mixed-race people altogether. Celibacy, for Stephen and for Bates, can be Coral's only future.

Bates quickly writes Coral out of the story in what seems to be an afterthought. “And Coral?” she asks, as if readers may have forgotten her existence now that Stephen’s identity crisis has been resolved, “How sweet and womanly and saintly she grew. In the long summer days [...] when the future was talked of, there was nothing for her” (383).¹⁵ She plans for her cousins, Bates adding that Coral would “be there to see and help, but always in the background” (383). With that, Bates renders the body of the mixed-race woman innocuous, positioning her as a sterile, mammy-like figure there to help her white cousins “do and be” without ever leaving the “background” or producing her own children (383). Ultimately, Bates achieves a narrative of intersectional reunion in the novel not through marriage but through Stephen’s prevention of a Southerner’s interracial marriage with his daughter. White men across sections unite to exclude the mixed-race woman and to protect the sanctity of white heritage.

“I Fell a Victim to the Wiles of the Yellow Vampire”

Better known for its celebration of a postwar nation reborn around the principles of white male supremacy, white female submission, and African American subjugation, Thomas Dixon, Jr.’s 1905 novel, *The Clansman*, seems like the last place to look for a depiction of interracial marriage, no less a relatively powerful and successful intermarriage. The plot, made famous by D. W. Griffith’s 1915 film, *The Birth of a Nation*, centers on the formation of the Ku Klux Klan after the “Black Plague of Reconstruction” places white Southerners at the mercy of

¹⁵ Of all the African American figures, Coral evokes the most sympathy from readers as the innocent victim of at least three generations of miscegenation, but sympathy works strangely in the novel. While sympathy for Stephen ultimately makes possible his rehabilitation to white masculinity, it also makes possible Coral’s marginalization from white society. Other characters’ sympathy for Stephen makes him a tragic victim whose fate must be changed if possible, but the same sympathetic impulse seems to make Coral’s marginalization an inevitable, if regrettable, outcome of miscegenation. Pity for Coral’s plight, shown most overtly by Letty, serves only to reinforce the sense of unavertable fate that separates Coral from her white relations even as it reunites her with them. It is Letty, her white aunt, to whom Coral turns for consolation when she learns of her mixed heritage and Letty who convinces Coral to accept her fated marginalization. Letty’s sympathy, as well as the reader’s, makes it easier to accept her blighted future as the only option while obscuring opportunities for alternate endings that allow Coral a future beyond celibacy and isolation

government-backed, African-American tyrants (Dixon 179). Though Lincoln, portrayed by Dixon as a Southern sympathizer, desires easy reconciliation with the rebel states, his chief adversary, Pennsylvania Senator and leader of Congress Austin Stoneman, opposes him at every turn and promises to exact vengeance upon the Southern enemy.¹⁶ After Lincoln's death, Stoneman succeeds in leading Congress to pass the Reconstruction Acts and bring impeachment charges against President Johnson. Imbued with power by Stoneman and his political policies, incompetent and malicious black men rule over the South. This reign of terror climaxes with Marion Lenior's rape by Gus, a former slave turned black squadron commander. As the Grand Dragon of the Klan, Ben Cameron avenges the rape of this white woman by leading a Klan raid to capture, try, and kill Gus, who might otherwise go unpunished under what Dixon portrays as the utterly corrupt, black-run government. The Klan restores white government by instilling fear in African Americans and bringing them once again under subjection to whites. The novel concludes with Stoneman's Northern children, Elsie and Phil, marrying into the Southern Cameron family. By subduing the black man and eradicating him from the government of the reconstructed nation, Dixon achieves a North-South reunion around white supremacy.

Reunion in *The Clansman* depends on more than removing the black threat, however; it requires the reconstruction of a stable white identity, which has been shaken by Civil War, emancipation, and the deviant white suitor. The subject of whiteness in Dixon's works has received significant attention from scholars in recent decades, but one character in particular

¹⁶ Stoneman stands in as a caricature of Thaddeus Stevens. Contemporaries speculated that Stevens, a life-long bachelor, might have engaged in a long-term secret marital relationship with his widowed, African-American housekeeper, Lydia Hamilton Smith. Dixon certainly capitalizes on this rumor, turning Brown into Stoneman's main motivation for punishing the South for the sin of slavery. In his 2012 film, *Lincoln*, Steven Spielberg likewise depicts Stevens as secretly living as husband to his housekeeper, a circumstance that further motivates him to fight for the rights of African Americans. Precedent certainly exists to think about Stevens/Stoneman and Smith/Brown's relationship as a forbidden marriage in the way that I do here.

remains understudied: Austin Stoneman, the powerful senator who takes political direction from his mulatta mistress and threatens postwar white supremacy. In *Race, Rape, and Lynching*, Sandra Gunning briefly touches on Stoneman's role in the novel, stating that his relationship with mulatta housekeeper Lydia Brown "epitomizes the misguided Northern attachment to the ex-slave, [...] the grave mistake made by the Yankees" (44). Kim Magowan expands on this analysis, pointing the fact that "Stoneman's liaison with Lydia Brown has catastrophic effects on the South;" however, she concludes that "this miscegenation between white men and black women doesn't possess the kind of shock value, or prompt the need to kill, that miscegenation between white women and black men does; Stoneman recovers from and recants his infatuation" (93). This reading, though accurate to some extent, seems dismissive of the important role that I argue Stoneman plays in making miscegenation between white men and black women possible. Scott Romine's essay explains how Dixon uses literary devices to "not so much *represent* whiteness as a stable, fixed essence, but *tell*[] it as a story of traumatic origins, heroic defense, and grandiose recovery" (125). He focuses primarily on *The Leopard's Spots*, but considering Stoneman's role in *The Clansman* can expand his argument to reveal how whiteness is frequently a tale of "heroic defense" against its own deviant members and "grandiose recovery" as it brings these nonconforming white men into compliance. Perhaps because she focuses on the play Dixon developed based on the *The Clansman*, Diana Paulin never addresses Stoneman's relationship with Brown, although interracial intimacy is the subject of her chapter on Dixon. However, she does consider the possibility of a homoerotic relationship between Stoneman and his chief henchman, Silas Lynch. Of Stoneman's rehabilitation at the end of this relationship, she says, "[...] reemphasizes the need both for whites to stick together and for the fortification of the borders that separate 'black' from 'white'" (137). Tara Bynum does an innovative analysis of

Lydia Brown in her essay, but Stoneman's role in the relationship is too tangential to be included in her argument.

Despite scholarly oversight, Stoneman plays a key role in hindering the effort to reinstate white supremacy that must be considered if we are to understand how whiteness and interracial intimacy work in Dixon's novel. Stoneman's indulgence in an interracial relationship and abuse of his political power as a white man is the danger that drives the plot in the novel because his nonconforming white masculinity destabilizes the definition of national whiteness and makes way for the black male rapist. I argue that, for Dixon, Stoneman's abnormal and corrupt relationship with mulatta housekeeper Lydia Brown poses the real threat in the novel, not the unleashing of the black beast upon white women. "Racist ideology," Magowan notes, "is predicated upon a notion of fixed, stable identity. In Dixon, the white man's identity, as white, [...] and thus as superior, breaks down" (79). Consistent with this reasoning, I contend that Stoneman's aberrant performance of masculinity in his relationship with Brown and his adoption of black characteristics challenges the "fixed, stable identity" upon which white supremacy is predicated, essentially fracturing white male identity from within and causing the novel's central identity crisis. As effective leader of the nation after Lincoln's death, Stoneman's personal identity crisis precipitates the nation's identity crisis as he plunges it into Reconstruction, a process that threatens to turn a white man's country into a black man's empire. The Klan's true mission in the novel is to wrest political control from the racially tainted Stoneman, the effective president for African American insurgents, and consolidate the meaning of white male identity to provide a solid basis for the rehabilitation of a white national identity.

Unlike the other authors included in this study, Dixon never portrays his interracial couple as married, either legally or by their own definition. However, Stoneman stands in as a

poorly veiled caricature of Thaddeus Stevens, a life-long bachelor whom contemporaries suspected of engaging in a marriage-like, if not legalized, relationship with his African-American housekeeper, Lydia Hamilton Smith. Dixon certainly capitalizes on this rumor, turning Brown into Stoneman's main motivation for punishing the South for the sin of slavery. In his 2012 film, *Lincoln*, Steven Spielberg depicts Stevens as secretly living as husband to his housekeeper, a circumstance that motivates him to fight for the rights of African Americans. Precedent certainly exists to think about Stevens/Stoneman and Smith/Brown's relationship as a forbidden marriage in the way that I do here. Dixon himself often hints at a marital relationship, dubbing Brown the "first lady of the land" when Stoneman attains the height of his political power, yet he refrains from giving their relationship the sanctity that marriage as a term might offer (90). Perhaps this denial of husband and wife labels stems from his belief that racial assimilation, most easily effected through marriage, is unconscionable. As Diana Paulin writes, Dixon "engaged the popular belief that black/white desire is 'always already' transgressive, 'impossible,' 'unspeakable,' and that interracial liaisons produce destabilizing and, more than not, 'tragic results'" (106). Dixon never articulates the marital connection between Stoneman and Brown because it is "unspeakable," capable of being talked about only circuitously. Moreover, according to Walter Benn Michaels, "marriage and 'the close sweet home-life' can make people more 'alike in soul and body' than can any physical relation" in Dixon's texts (190). Denying his interracial couple the title of husband and wife prevents them from becoming so "alike in soul and body" that Brown becomes white or Stoneman becomes irredeemably identified with blacks in the novel. Reunion necessitates the removal of the Brown woman and the return of the deviant suitor to the white fold, neither of which can happen in Dixon's world if the pair are married in any sense.

Though the lack of a stated marital relationship prevents Stoneman from becoming too “alike in body and soul” to his lover, the implicit marriage between the two takes its toll on Stoneman. Early descriptions align his power with the ferocity of a savage animal rather than the admirable force of a great leader and thereby impugn his whiteness from the very first moment of his introduction. Dixon conditions readers to think of Stoneman as more than an advocate for African American rights; Stoneman’s animal qualities imply that he has absorbed the stains of blackness through prolonged contact. Descriptions of Stoneman as “the most powerful parliamentary leader in American history” contrast with “his grim eagle look” and a deformed leg that “ended in a mere bunch of flesh, resembling more closely an elephant’s hoof than the foot of a man” (39). Later, as Stoneman motivates a crowd of legislators to vote in favor of the Reconstruction acts, Dixon notes that “the scream of an eagle rang in his voice, his huge ugly hand held the crook of his cane with the clutch of a tiger, his tongue flew with the hiss of an adder, and his big deformed foot seemed to grip the floor as the claw of a beast” (143). The combination of animal characteristics here suggests that Stoneman morphs into a vicious, nearly mythological beast at the height of his power, but it also hints at the black source from which he draws his enthusiasm. His animal characterization should be a red flag for readers because it connects him to the only other people in the novel described in terms of their animal-like traits: African Americans. For instance, a black candidate for South Carolina House representative, Old Aleck, might be a powerful orator, but his “protruding stomach, resembling an elderly monkey’s” makes him laughable in the eyes of Ben Cameron and Phil Stoneman. Gus has “the short, heavy-set neck of the lower order of animals” and eyes that “gleamed apelike under his scant brows” (216). Most importantly though, descriptions of Stoneman’s “wife” provide the damning evidence that he has been tainted by association and consequently lowered to the level

of African Americans in the novel. A “woman of extraordinary animal beauty and the fiery temper of a leopardess,” Brown matches Stoneman’s tiger clutch and unbridled passion. Both described as large, dangerous cats, Stoneman and Brown seem well matched in terms of power and strength of will, but Dixon slowly reveals this to be an unequal union that infects both Stoneman and the nation.¹⁷

Stoneman’s failure to perform white masculinity appropriately in public prompts others to gossip about his motivation for pursuing equal rights, leading them to note his strange relationship to his mulatta housekeeper. In a private debate over black voting rights, Stoneman’s adamant support for suffrage so impresses his sub-human qualities upon Lincoln that Lincoln finally asks, “Look here, Stoneman; have you some deep personal motive in this vengeance on the South?” (53). In response, Lincoln receives only “silence and a scowl,” leading him to suspect that Stoneman’s motives transcend his moral claims (53). As Brown begins to draw attention for “her jewels, her dresses, her airs, her assumption of the dignity of the presiding genius of National legislation and her domination of the old Commoner and his life,” D. C. buzzes with gossip over the true nature of her relationship with Stoneman (57-58). Though Brown poses as merely Stoneman’s housekeeper, her manner of dress and “assumption of the dignity” due to Stoneman as the “presiding genius of National legislation” suggest more the standing of a wife than hired help. Dixon’s chapter title, “The First Lady of the Land,” certainly directs readers to think of her as the wife of the most powerful man in the nation. More

¹⁷ Much of Stoneman’s deviance lies in failure to protect himself from the wiles of the erotically charged African American woman. Of nineteenth-century views on black female sexuality, Hazel Carby writes, “Confronted by the black woman, the white man behaved in a manner that was considered to be entirely untempered by any virtuous qualities; the white male, in fact, was represented as being merely prey to the rampant sexuality of his female slaves,” or in this case, servant (27). Carby continues by explaining that, in the presence of the non-virtuous black female, the “baser male instincts were entirely uncontrolled” (27). Stoneman’s unrelenting vengeance upon the South and his transformation into a ferocious beast echo Carby’s words about the black woman’s influence on the white man.

insidiously, Brown's "domination" of Stoneman and "his life" implies that she might be rightfully entitled to this dignity not simply as "first lady" but as the real "presiding genius" behind equal rights legislation. Brown directs Stoneman's actions and, by extension, all of Congress's decisions through her husband's influence.

The power Brown gains through her white legislator "husband" should lead readers to fear intermarriage between white men and black women just as much as they fear black male rape of white women. Both threaten the authority of white men, but the consensual relationship between a white man and a black woman carries impending national consequences. Stoneman's weakness for Brown leads him to over-identify with her non-white interests, making him vulnerable to her persuasion. Stained by his proximity to an African American, Stoneman, like Stephen Gatsimer, is unfit for political office because of the danger he poses to the successful reemergence of a white national identity, but unlike Stephen, the victim of black deception, Stoneman willingly engages in an interracial relationship and still refuses to relinquish his political rights as a white man. Instead, he uses his legislative weight to force through Congress measures promoting racial equality. As "the seat of Empire" shifts from "the White House to a little dark house on the Capitol hill," the "strange brown woman" now possesses a "sinister animal beauty and the restless eyes of a leopardess" (79). Stoneman's dark house, the seat of African American rule, eclipses the White House, symbol of white supremacy, in political power. Brown acts as gatekeeper to the "dark house" in which Stoneman presides: "no person was allowed to enter it without first stating his business or presenting a petition to the tawny brown woman with restless eyes who sat in state in the front" (90-91). Stoneman forces all white male leaders to pass through the "brown woman," thereby polluting white masculinity and allowing for the transmission of her brown stain to the entire nation. With the increase in her

vicarious power, Brown's previously "extraordinary animal beauty" becomes "sinister." Paired with "the restless eyes of a leopardess," these descriptions of Brown make her sound like a hungry predator on the hunt for victims, a spirit reflected in Stoneman's own predation upon a war-torn South.

Stoneman's advocacy, at Brown's prompting, for the passage of the Reconstruction Acts ultimately makes possible Marion's rape by the bestial black man. His relationship with Brown sets into motion a chain of events that lead to the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan by the end of the novel. Typical readings of Marion's rape and the ensuing Klan violence pit white masculinity against an insurgent black masculinity that the Klan overcomes to restore national peace and union. Blight claims that, "When Gus is thrown upon the ground by Klansmen who have castrated and murdered him, the 'nation' achieves a rebirth" (395). Dixon portrays Klansmen as "noble founders of a new, reunited nation, the white Lancelots of the American reunion," achieved, according to Blight, through their violence against sinister black characters, yet mastering the violent black man is only half the battle in the Klan's efforts to found a new nation and achieve reunion (Blight 111). Behind Gus stands Stoneman, the white leader whose policies placed Gus in a position of unchecked authority. Dixon implicates Stoneman in Marion's rape by invoking the image of a tiger's claws around Marion's neck. When Gus attacks Marion, he gives a "single tiger spring" before "the black claws of the beast sank into the soft white throat" (304). This description recalls the previous depiction of Stoneman gripping his cane with the "clutch of a tiger" and serves to identify the black rapist with the white legislator—Stoneman's claws sink vicariously into Marion's neck. Once again linking Stoneman to the African American tyrants who rule the South after the passage of the Reconstruction acts, Dixon also describes the chaos-causing black passions that, "once aroused, are as the fury of the tiger" (293). Tracing Dixon's

use of the word “tiger” identifies Stoneman with a brooding African American community awaiting its chance at vengeance and reveals him to be the leader, if not the instigator, of the black scourge upon the South.¹⁸ Stoneman’s connection to Marion’s rape complicates Romine’s notion that, in Dixon’s world of eroticized political action, “Black men vote to rape, white men vote in order to save civilization” (131). Stoneman’s vote, and his coercion of other white men’s votes, makes African American suffrage possible in the first place, making his vote an act of symbolic rape. In this formulation, Dixon pits white male votes against white male votes.

Marion’s rape and suicide serve as a call to action to Dixon’s white heroes, motivating them to reclaim control of the South from the African American authorities instated by the Reconstruction acts, but reunion in its fullest sense does not take place when the KKK murders Gus and brings a violent end to “negro rule” (371). Intersectional reunion only triumphs over Stoneman’s practiced interracial union when Stoneman abandons Brown, confesses his sins against white masculinity, and permits his daughter, Elsie, to marry Southern patriot Ben Cameron. Stoneman’s mulatta wife must vanish before the resolution of Stoneman’s, and the nation’s, identity crisis becomes possible. Under the strain of preparing for President Johnson’s impeachment trial, Stoneman’s health abandons him. His sickness, a physical manifestation of his moral illness, begins his road to recovery from the black poison that has overtaken his life. Elsie, who for more than eight years has avoided Stoneman’s “dark house” and the “strange brown woman” who keeps it, now returns as a grown woman to attend to her father. In a move that suggests the multiple valences of Stoneman’s illness, she “installed an army nurse, took charge of the place, and ignored the existence of the brown woman, refusing to speak to her or

¹⁸ Behind Stoneman’s leadership, of course, lies Lydia Brown’s influence. Tara Bynum does an excellent reading of the mulatta woman’s power in her essay “‘One Important Witness:’ Remembering Lydia Brown in Thomas Dixon’s *The Clansman*.” Though I focus on Stoneman here, Brown power, and Dixon’s fear of it, should not be overlooked.

permit her to enter her father's room" (167). The choice of an army nurse suggests that Stoneman is a casualty of war, but the expulsion of the "brown woman" implies a spiritual battle against a demonic force. Indeed, Stoneman later confesses himself to have been "a victim to the wiles of the yellow vampire who kept my house" (371). Dixon poses only one solution for Stoneman's exorcism and recuperation: move south.

Under his doctor's orders and at his children's behest, Stoneman agrees to remove to Piedmont, South Carolina, where he can begin recovery from his infirmities, but Stoneman's condition only worsens as he persists in punishing the South even from his sickbed. In a meeting with his black henchman, Silas Lynch, Stoneman schemes to bring the black population under his control while encouraging disrespect and defiance toward former masters. Immediately afterward, Stoneman has "a stroke of paralysis" that leaves him to "lie in mental darkness for months" (208). This "mental darkness" recalls his "dark house," presided over by the B/brown woman, and suggests that, though she has vanished from the narrative, Brown's spirit still possesses and poisons Stoneman. His children note that, in this weak and near-vegetative state, "his strange eyes follow[] them about in childlike eagerness," a description that invokes the "strange brown woman" and her "restless eyes." During his incapacitation, Stoneman almost seems to channel Brown, whose traits manifest through and haunt his body despite her physical absence. Though he begins to rally and even entertains an appeal on behalf of Southern whites from his doctor, Ben Cameron's father, the "appeal had left the old Commoner unshaken in his idea" (297). After Marion's rape and Gus's murder, Stoneman maintains that justice must be done and legally pursues Ben, convicting him of Gus's murder and sentencing him to death. Only later does he realize that his own son, Phil, has in fact committed the murder and now faces Stoneman's death sentence.

Confronted with the impending sacrifice of his only son, who faces death because of his own orders, Stoneman finally expels the demonic blackness that has stained his soul and sees the light of white supremacy in a moment of conversion. When insubordinate African American troops, installed by Stoneman himself, refuse to heed Stoneman's demands to release Phil, he collapses in despair, confessing to Dr. Cameron the divine retribution at work. "My will alone forged the chains of negro rule" that have led to Phil's predicament, he admits, but he immediately shifts this guilt onto the "yellow vampire who kept my house" (371). "I dreamed of lifting her to my level," he explains; instead, "I felt myself sinking into the black abyss of animalism" (371). In this moment, Stoneman expels the last lingering taint of Lydia Brown by acknowledging what the white male heroes of the novel have tried to convince him of all along: African Americans are innately inferior and incapable of being incorporated into the union. For reunion to succeed, Stoneman, like Stephen, must expel the mulatta presence from the nation. The last of Stoneman's political power drains when the Klan presents his son to him alive and well. A well-placed ambush, led by Ben, of the processional leading Phil to his execution forced the black troops to surrender peacefully. Acknowledging the superiority of the Klan's approach to race relations, Stoneman has his come-to-Jesus moment, exclaiming "The Klan! No? Yes! It's true—glory to God, they've saved my boy—Phil—Phil!" (373). His exorcism successful, Stoneman emerges from "mental darkness" and gives "glory to God" for the salvation made possible by the Klan.

Stoneman's exorcism makes possible Elsie's marriage to the Southern hero, Ben Cameron. In the final lines of the novel, she sees Ben off to a promising election. Noting that "[y]our fate hangs in the balance of this election to-night," she nevertheless promises to share "with you, success or failure, life or death," as if repeating her wedding vows (374). But Ben's

fate, and the fate of the South and the nation, has already been decided. “Success, not failure,” he assures her, “The Grand Dragons of six States have already wired victory” (374). The Klan has fixed the election and coerced black voters to support Ben’s candidacy for an unnamed office. Elsie’s marriage to Ben not only replaces the Northern legislator with the Southern but also replaces her father’s aberrant and dangerous interracial intimacy with a North-South intimacy. This final scene offers a vision of white reunion that neutralizes transgressive white men like Stoneman and excludes African Americans to bring stability to whiteness. As Scott Romine argues, “Dixon does not so much *represent* whiteness as a stable, fixed essence, but *tells* it as a story of traumatic origins, heroic defense, and grandiose recovery” (125). My analysis of Stoneman suggests that the narrative Dixon creates is not simply one of white against black but white against white as the Southern heroes continue to fight against Stoneman’s progressive Reconstruction ideology. This picture of white men at war with themselves presents whiteness as anything but a “stable, fixed essence;” rather, the novel, as Romine suggests, maps the postwar, white male journey to achieve a sense of fixedness. With the Grand Dragons at the helm, the nation can rest assured that its identity will remain staunchly white.

“Civilization Has Been Saved”

The Clansman concludes with Ben’s triumphant proclamation that “I am a successful revolutionist—[...] Civilization has been saved, and the South redeemed from shame” (374). With its “revolution” to reinstate white order after the reign of black chaos, Dixon’s novel acts almost as a bookend to Jerome B. Holgate’s *Sojourn in the City of Amalgamation*, where interracial marriages symbolized the end of ordered civilization. Where Holgate feared that abolitionist efforts would lead to a society in which “We are all intermingled, without regard to colour or character,” Dixon, from the other side of the Civil War, confidently asserted the

endurance of a color line that would protect white supremacy (19).¹⁹ Though separated in publication date by nearly seventy years, Dixon's novel shares an interesting feature with Holgate's *Sojourn*: counterintuitively, both authors choose white men to fill the role of arch villain in their novels. In *Sojourn*, Sternfast drugs his daughter so he can marry her to her black fiancé without having to worry about gaining her consent. Stoneman's Reconstruction Acts similarly revoke white rights to consent, imposing black rule and paving the way for Marion's rape by Gus. Julia escapes her fate when she awakes to find her African American groom to be none other than her white lover in blackface, but Marion does not escape so easily. After her rape by Gus, she does the only thing a violated white woman could be expected to do at the time—commit suicide. Despite their disparate fates, both Julia and Marion have their right to consent revoked, either literally by drugging or symbolically by the shift of power from white to black men. In both cases, black men pose the immediate threat to white womanhood, but white men zealous to usher in an age of racial equality mastermind the schemes that make possible the rape of white women. Just as Sternfast determines after the death of his white wife that Julia will marry a black man to atone for his intraracial marriage sin, Stoneman “began to plot the most cruel and awful vengeance in human history” as soon as he realizes the South will lose the war (40). Stoneman seeks to make the South atone for its racism. Gus's rape of Marion represents only the fully realized manifestation of this vengeance. Like Holgate, Dixon also chooses a rather literal name for his novel's white tyrant. Stoneman and Sternfast are men without hearts and without mercy upon their own race. They hold fast to their misguided principles regardless of the outcome. *Sojourn* and *Clansman* further share an investment in the white male hero.

¹⁹ African-American-authored texts, including Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy*, Charles Chesnut's *The House behind the Cedars*, several of Chesnut's short stories, and Nella Larsen's much later *Passing*, challenged the notion of a color line with the concept of passing. That “black” characters in these and other novels could choose to live as white or black proves the color line to fictional, if powerful, boundary existing primarily in white imagination.

Julia's suitor cleverly disguises himself as a black man so he can rescue his beloved from her tragic fate. Ben Cameron leads a Klan raid to capture and kill Gus, thus avenging his childhood sweetheart's violation. The assertion of black male sexuality undoubtedly plays a central role in both authors' fears for the nation, but the choice of white male villains against whom the white male savior must strive in both texts seems more than coincidental.

The choice of a white male antagonist certainly points to the authors' belief that black men are too powerless or ignorant to orchestrate long-range plans in the fashion of Sternfast and Stoneman. However, the underlying paranoia about white masculinity that emerges in these similarities should not be ignored. Incompliant white men, whether in the antebellum or postbellum periods pose a greater danger to the survival of white supremacy than do emancipated black men because they destabilize the meaning of white male identity. Holgate depicts an entire city in which enthusiasm for racial equality leads to the overturn of traditional performances of white masculinity. He restores order at the end of the novel through the white suitor's rescue of and marriage to the white damsel in distress. Dixon also restores stability to white male identity and power to white supremacy through the reinstatement of the endogamous marriage contract. Stoneman undermines the strength of white supremacy and, with it, the project of sectional reunion. Throughout the novel, he quite literally challenges the overlapping projects of North-South reunion and the resurrection of white supremacy by imposing upon white Southerners punishments that make possible the emergence of the black male rapist. Gus functions only as a proxy for Stoneman, who becomes the real foe against whom Ben Cameron and his band of Southern heroes must fight to achieve sectional reunion in the novel. Instead of a rallying point, white supremacy becomes a point of contention between men who identify as white but disagree over the behaviors attendant upon that identity. To achieve resolution and

reunion, Dixon likewise turns to the marriage contract. Stoneman verbally repents of his misdeeds, finally accepting that he has been a victim of the black woman's wiles much as Sternfast has been a victim of Wildfire's enthusiasm. Stoneman's recuperation from his identity crisis comes through the symbolic sacrifice he makes in allowing his daughter to marry Ben, Grand Dragon of the Klan and epitome of all that Stoneman resents about the South. When the two are united, the marriage contract is fulfilled, bringing stability to white male identity and to the white supremacist nation.

Bates and Dixon's novels capture the post-Reconstruction impulse toward a sectional reunion that excluded not only African Americans but white men who aligned themselves too closely with black women. Bates's understudied novel provides an important bridge between the failure of Reconstruction in 1877 and the triumph of Dixon's rabid racism in 1905 because it signifies a reunited nation rallying around the survival of white supremacy. If William Wells Brown and Frank J. Webb stood on the eve of the Civil War asking what made America a white man's nation, Bates emerged on the other side of the war asking how the sections might reunite around a white national identity, and Dixon celebrated the success of this reunion. Antebellum authors who wrote about interracial marriage shared with their racist postbellum counterparts a desire to understand the source and strength of white male privilege. Despite their differences in ideology, both antebellum and postbellum authors looked to marriage not only as the source of this privilege but also as the potential source of its breakdown. The identities and privileges of white men who engage in interracial relationships come under direct scrutiny from white authors seeking to uphold the privileges of white supremacy in the postbellum era. While, for Webb, Garie's tragedy lies in his failure to recognize the strength of social prejudice to overcome his democratic rights, Bates conceptualizes the white suitor's tragedy as his succumbing to the

charms of the mixed-race woman and his requisite loss of privilege thereafter. Dixon's *Clansman* takes this idea a step further as it attempts to illustrate why intermarried white men must forfeit their democratic rights: they threaten to expand citizenship rights beyond the white family to the non-white partner.

This larger literary narrative, stretching from 1867 to 1905, binds together novels as disparate as Child's and Dixon's in their use of interracial marriage plots to project the possibilities for national reunion, revealing how later white authors co-opted Child's idealistic vision to re-stabilize the power of white supremacy and to make Dixon's novel possible. Tracing postwar literary intermarriages from Child's optimistic portrayals to Bates's cautionary tale to Dixon's rejection of such interracial unions establishes a larger narrative of the evolution of attitudes toward reunion through representations of interracial marriage. Mapping this narrative undermines the sense that white supremacy would necessarily be the unifying ideology of the postwar nation and reveals the extent to which reinforcement of the marriage contract made the resuscitation of that ideology possible.

Coda

“An Insurmountable Barrier between Us”: The Decline of Interracial Marriage Plots and the Rise of Passing

In an original version of the dissertation, I projected a final chapter on the evolution of the interracial marriage plot to incorporate issues of passing at the end of the nineteenth century. However, as the project developed, the issues of passing and assimilation raised by these novels began to seem tangential to the questions of white masculinity and privilege central to the dissertation. Yet I would be remiss to conclude without mentioning these ideas as a future direction for my research. “After the Civil War,” Barbara Ladd notes, “mixed-blood characters began to appear with some frequency” in American fiction, an unsurprising fact given the increased interest in interracial marriage plots (345). “The issue of passing,” she continues, “was of particular interest to many of these writers” (345). Joel Williamson adds that fear of “invisible blackness” escalated as the nation approached the turn of the century (108). My interest in William Dean Howells’s *An Imperative Duty* and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper’s *Iola Leroy* lies in the intersection of passing and interracial marriage that occurs in these texts. Though, as Giulia Fabi argues, passing has always been embedded in the African American literary tradition, it most often occurred as a separate plot only vaguely related to the intermarriage motif.¹ In postwar fiction, this distinction between marriage and passing begins to break down.

¹ William Wells Brown’s novel features Clotel passing as both white and male when she returns to the South to attempt to free her daughter from slavery. Ellen Craft famously passed as a white man to enable her and her husband’s escape from slavery. Harriet Jacobs’s 1861 *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* also includes Jacobs’s escape from her long-term hiding place dressed as a man with charcoaled face. In the latter half of *The Garies* not discussed in depth in chapter two, Clarence, Jr. passes as a white man after his parents’ deaths. Marriage and passing begin to intertwine in the narrative when Clarence begins courting a white woman. After his racial background is revealed, Clarence and his fiancée are separated by her angry father. Both subsequently die of broken hearts.

Interracial marriage narratives became a way for black and white authors to think about the ethics of passing as well as the threats and benefits. Though touched on only briefly in chapters three and four, passing plays a significant role in the interracial marriage plots in Lydia Maria Child and Margaret Holmes Bates's postwar novels. Child's Rosa and Flora both choose to pass after marrying white men, deciding it best that their children know as little as possible of the stigma attached to their ancestry. Stephen's trouble in *The Chamber over the Gate* originates with his wife's decision to pass as white. These postbellum, white-authored novels begin to engage with passing, but Child and Bates's novels focus more on interracial marriage than the decision to pass, which remains an overlooked issue in these texts, especially since passing implies a deliberate decision. Though the grown women in both texts choose to pass, their children are simply unaware of their racial ancestry.

Five years after the publication of *Gate*, however, Howells shifted the conversation away from marriage and toward passing when he produced a narrative in which the white suitor willingly offers marriage to a woman of mixed-race. He positions his white suitor, Dr. Olney, as a hero who saves the fair, if technically not white, damsel in distress from the race fate that awaits her after the revelation of her black heritage.² Marriage to a Caucasian male acts as an invitation to pass, an invitation that the heroine, Rhoda, accepts after some persuading. Rhoda initially protests the possibility of their marriage because "I am a negress," but Olney brushes aside contemporary concerns about miscegenation and nonchalantly responds, "what of it, if I

Clarence's sister, Emily, chooses not to pass and happily marries into the dominant black family in the novel. Webb seems to be the first author to make passing part of the intermarriage narrative.

² Howells's take on the preferability of passing differs significantly from Webb's. As a white man, Howells assumes that anyone given the opportunity would choose to be white. As Fabi writes, "In *An Imperative Duty* whiteness remains the normative utopia and passing the best of all possible endings," a notion Webb disproves in his novel and to which Harper returns in *Iola Leroy* (62). Black authors routinely depict passing as a loss of family and community for which the privileges of whiteness are but poor compensation.

love you?” (209). Love, in Howells’s narrative, can overcome social and legal obstacles. In a 1903 letter to a friend, Howells reflects on his 1891 sentimental novel and the indifference he expresses toward intermarriage in it, clarifying his intentions: “I merely argued that a man who really loved a woman would find his love settling any ‘race question’ involved” (qtd. in Rosenthal, “White Blackbird” 504). Though his commentary tries to downplay the significance of the marriage and identity issues he raises by making marriage purely a matter of “love” between two individuals, Howells’s conclusion makes it quite clear that love does not settle the “race question” for the nation.

At the end of the novel, Olney and Rhoda decide to move to Italy, rather than remaining in America, despite the patriotism emphasized early in the novel. Debra Rosenthal reads this ending as “tragic in that [Rhoda] cannot be both biracial and American [...] Rhoda obliterates herself from society by killing both her American identity and her black ancestry” (510). I would argue that neither can Olney marry a legally black woman and maintain a property in white masculinity. Olney too obliterates his identity as an American and as a white man; the question is whether he does so by moving to Italy or if moving to Italy merely reflects his obliterated white male identity after his marriage to a mixed-race woman. Howells’s commentary scoffs at the notion that two people cannot marry based on preference simply because of race, but his decision to expatriate his interracial couple suggests that Olney has done something “un-American” in knowingly helping a mixed-race woman to pass as white.³ Space and time permitting, I would build the case that Olney’s expatriation reflects the loss of his property in whiteness after

³ In expatriating his interracial couple, Howells follows in the literary tradition of expelling the white-appearing body established by Harriet Beecher Stowe.

breaking the marriage contract. Olney relinquishes his democratic rights and his citizenship in choosing to marry Rhoda; expatriating himself merely confirms this forfeiture.

In 1892, Frances Harper published her response to Howells's dismissive handling of the identity crisis that follows on interracial marriage for both the mulatta and the white man. Harper shifts perspectives throughout the novel, introducing Iola through the white suitor's consciousness but eventually transferring the narrative perspective to Iola. This approach allows Harper to address the concerns of white masculinity as well as black femininity. The novel features a tragic-turned-triumphant mulatta who rejects repeated marriage proposals from a white suitor who offers to lift her from the degradation of slavery and "bury her secret in his Northern home" (60). Like Olney, Dr. Gresham believes that passing can solve all of Iola's problems and bridge the racial gap between them, but he also selfishly considers her passing a means of protecting his own identity as a white man. "[R]esolved to win her for his bride [...] and hide from his aristocratic relations all knowledge of her mournful past," Gresham envisions himself as the protector who will cloak Iola's degradation in whiteness through successful assimilation, i.e. marriage (60). Whereas Olney leaves the country after marrying a mixed-race woman and assisting her to pass, Gresham imagines that he can protect his own status as a white man if he can successfully "hide" "all knowledge" of Iola's ancestry and enslavement. Though Gresham considers himself a hero for his willingness to accept and protect Iola's secret, he also seeks to protect himself and his white family by keeping her racial background hidden.

In her introduction to Frances Harper's 1892 novel, *Iola Leroy*, Hazel Carby argues that Harper refashions the modes of the female sentimental tradition to establish an alternate black womanhood. I would build on her analysis reveal how Harper reconstructs black womanhood, and black identity, by rejecting the white suitor as the proffered mediator of racial reunion. Iola's

rejection of Gresham is, more importantly, a rejection of the white suitor's identity crisis. She repeatedly declines his marriage proposals, claiming that "there is an insurmountable barrier between us" (114). Part of that barrier is Gresham's attitude toward racial reunion: ignore difference when possible, exclude it when impossible. The white suitor in Harper's novel attempts to remedy race relations by offering near-whites like Iola the opportunity to pass. Rather than genuinely uniting the races, Gresham's proposal symbolically offers to absorb the acceptable portion of emancipated African Americans without providing for the portion too dark to pass. Harper uses the mulatta's refusal of the white suitor as a rejection of his capacity to mediate race relations through the facilitation of her passing and cultural assimilation. The other aspect of this barrier is Gresham's desire to erase and co-opt Iola's identity crisis rather than allowing her to establish a sense of black identity. Iola's African American kinship and her experience as a slave become vital to her sense of being in the novel. By refusing to allow Iola to pass, Harper places the struggle to define identity squarely upon Iola and other newly freed blacks in a way that denies the white suitor the chance to claim emancipation and passing as his identity crisis. Initially shocked by the revelation of her ancestry and her sale into slavery, Iola struggles to come to a place where she can admit that the "best blood in my veins is African blood, and I am not ashamed of it" (208). To let Iola and Gresham marry would be to allow this identity crisis to shift from the mulatta to the white suitor. Instead, Harper returns Iola to her African American family origins and marries her to a similarly complexioned doctor. Together, they embark on a mission to create a space of identity for emancipated people. The black man and woman claim their place as citizens with a responsibility to remain in the United States and uplift their downtrodden race. *Iola Leroy* signals the moment when narratives of interracial marriage transition into passing novels. Issues of white male identity become subordinated to

questions of black male and female identity and citizenship in this emerging genre. The white suitor lingers on in twentieth-century novels like Nella Larsen's *Passing*, Jessie Fauset's *Plum Bun*, and Robert Penn Warren's *Band of Angels*, but he becomes a mechanism by which to facilitate the mixed-race woman's identity crisis as she confronts the option of passing.

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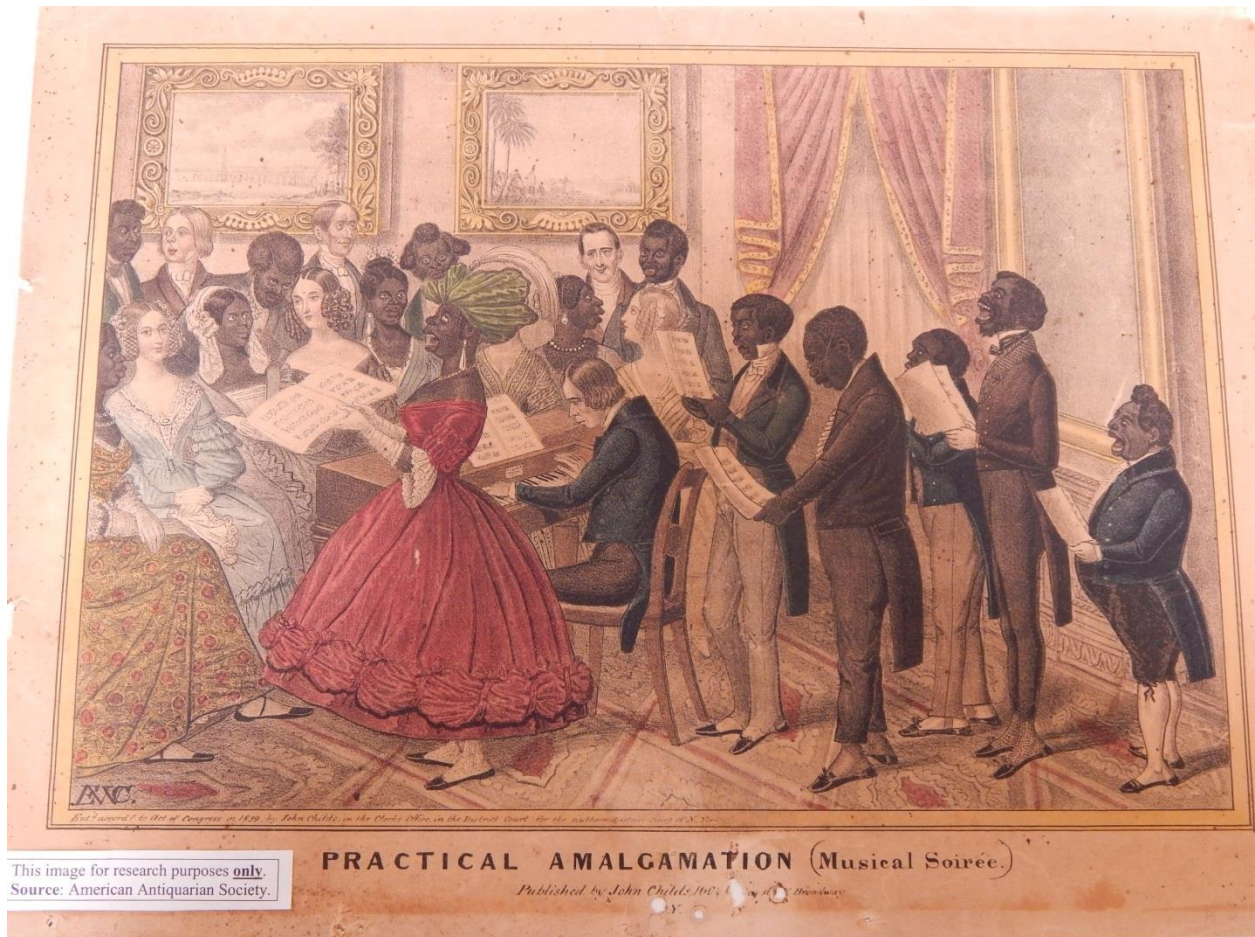


Figure 2 *Musical Soirée*, Edward Williams Clay (1839). Courtesy American Antiquarian Society.



PRACTICAL AMALGAMATION. (The Wedding.)

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the Year 1839, by John Childs, in the Clerk's Office in the District Court in the Southern District of New York.
Published by JOHN CHILDS, 160 Nassau Street, New York.
Also Just Published: The Amalgamation Tales, The Courtesans, The Probs., Johnny Q., & Black Cat.

Figure 3 *The Wedding*, Edward Williams Clay (1839). Courtesy American Antiquarian Society.



Figure 4 *An Amalgamation Waltz*, Edward Williams Clay (1839). Courtesy American Antiquarian Society.



Figure 5 *The Fruits of Amalgamation*, Edward Williams Clay (1839). Courtesy American Antiquarian Society.