



# Relative Races

GENEALOGIES OF

INTERRACIAL KINSHIP IN

NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA



Brigitte  
Fielder

RELATIVE RACES



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IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF

Ann Dorothy Summerford Fielder  
(1918–2011)

&

Thelma Rhoda Richards Degon  
(1922–2014)

AND IN HUMBLE DEDICATION TO MY PARENTS,

Sue Ann Fielder &  
Stephan Howard Fielder,  
who taught me to read.

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# Introduction

## Genealogies of Interracial Kinship

IN KATE CHOPIN'S 1893 STORY, "Désirée's Baby," race follows a queer genealogy. Désirée is a woman of unknown parentage, adopted as an infant and raised by white people. She marries a wealthy enslaver, Armand, and they have a child together. Three months pass, and other characters begin to exchange knowing looks about the child. Armand's temperament toward his family changes entirely as he turns from a proud father into an absent and avoidant one. Désirée herself finally notices what seems to be some resemblance between her child and an enslaved "quadroon" boy. She confronts Armand for an explanation, and he angrily replies, "It means that the child is not white . . . It means that you are not white."<sup>1</sup> Armand's logical shift from characterizing his child's race to making a statement about Désirée's illustrates the nonnormative directions in which racial inheritance sometimes flows.

"Désirée's Baby" represents what might best be called a "backward" genealogy of racial transfer, as Désirée is re-racialized by virtue not of her own parentage but via the racialization of her child. Coming to see the baby as visibly Black, Armand assumes that Désirée herself must therefore be racially mixed.<sup>2</sup> At the story's end, of course, we discover that Armand actually has Black ancestry, a fact that has been hidden from him by his white Creole father and mixed-race mother. Still, the racial refiguring of Désirée—a figuring dependent upon the emerging Blackness of her baby—has already taken

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effect. While we learn nothing of Désirée's biological parents over the course of the story, she effectively becomes a mixed-race heroine. She and her baby are both cast out of the husband/father's house because of their supposed, shared Blackness. "Désirée's Baby" narrates an effective reversal of racial transfer from child to mother rather than the other way around. This story shows how the production of "amalgamated" children has implications even for previously racially defined parents, particularly for mothers who are held responsible for (re)producing race.

While one might initially call this a story of racial misrecognition since we learn that Armand is the one—but not necessary the only one—who is "really" Black, the fact that both woman and child can be racially re-figured is illustrative of the slippery business of racialization: "white" women apparently have the potential to be racially marked—effectively re-racialized—by their children. Alys Eve Weinbaum argues that "Ultimately, *there are no white people in this text*, whose deepest meaning pivots on recognition of the pretense that neither the 'pure' origins of individuals nor those of nations can ever be discerned."<sup>3</sup> However, giving readers a genealogical racialization of Armand via a revealed mixed-race mother does not turn him into a Black man any more so than having a Black child turns any white nineteenth-century male character into someone who will acknowledge and care for that child. Armand's own embodiment does not give this racial genealogy away. And after he expels Désirée and their baby from his home, neither will his kinship relations suggest his Black ancestry. Although revealed to both Armand and the reader, we presume that his racial genealogy will remain a secret, thus preserving Armand's whiteness and status in his white supremacist community and the white supremacist nation, while Désirée effectively becomes a mixed-race heroine by the story's close.<sup>4</sup>

In Désirée's re-racialization we observe a trajectory of racial transfer that does not work according to normative models of the genealogical inheritance of race wherein race flows from biological parents to children. Chopin's story is one of many narratives in the long nineteenth century that explore how racial formation in the United States follows queer genealogical roots rather than normative ones. In the queer genealogy Chopin probes, it is possible for race to be transferred from child to mother. It is also possible for race to skip generations, to be reconstructed entirely between one generation and the next, as in Armand's case. Although racialization often depends upon factors such as individual identification and physical racial presentation, Chopin's story of racial (re)production

shows us how race is also relative. It is produced not in individual bodies themselves, but, crucially, in the relationships between them—in kinship relations that are not simply direct genealogies of racial inheritance from one generation to the next, but which work in decidedly gendered and non-heteronormative ways.

*Relative Races: Genealogies of Interracial Kinship in Nineteenth-Century America* presents an alternative theory of how race is constructed. Rather than tracing “downward” genealogies by which race is transmitted from parents to children, my readings of nineteenth-century literature show how race can follow other directions. This theory of race turns to queer theorizations of time in order to describe the non-heteronormative, nonbiological models by which genealogies of interracial kinship (re)construct race. Contrary to notions of biological and cultural racial inheritance (understood as the genealogical transfer of racial materiality and identity from parents to children), I show how race is not simply constructed according to heteronormative trajectories. Rather, race follows different lineages in narratives of interracial kinship, which themselves defy neat boundaries between races and clear correlations of familial and racial identification. Reading race’s queer genealogies shows us how race is not constructed according to mere biology or even within individual bodies, but in the relations between racialized bodies. This is the queer genealogy of racialization in which Désirée comes to function as a mixed-race Black woman by virtue of her child’s visible Blackness.

In framing this project around how race is constructed via kinship relations, it bears mentioning that what I am *not* discussing is what Alisha Gaines describes as “temporary black individuals operating under the alibi of racial empathy.”<sup>5</sup> While interracial kinship relations sometimes do and sometimes do not produce the kinds of (temporary or lasting) empathy that Gaines describes, I am concerned, rather, in instances of how such relationships produce race itself, though in unpredictable ways. My discussion of racialization extends beyond the notions of individual, racial identification with which it might conflict (as we see in the case of Désirée). While the history of antiblackness is central to US racial formation and therefore central to my project, my discussion also includes the racialization of Indigenous people in literary and cultural discourses. The continued conflation of indigeneity and race in popular and academic discussions of racialization has had lasting implications, as discussed by Kimberly Tall-Bear, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, Jean M. O’Brien, and other Native scholars, and adds an additional problem to be unpacked in discussing US histories

of racial formation.<sup>6</sup> I do not wish to conflate racialization and indigeneity, but instead mean to recognize what Jodi Byrd calls “the entanglement of colonization and racialization,” by recognizing how racialization cannot be divorced from matters of land and sovereignty.<sup>7</sup> This point becomes clear in several of the texts I discuss.

The theory of race I present here therefore makes apparent how race (and racism) are made and matter beyond the bodily scale, in the domestic spaces of family and nation that reveal race’s structures in their future-oriented trajectories of racial production and reproduction. I read texts that exhibit processes of race-making that are not necessarily heteronormative (even when they may follow heterosexual genealogies) and which are produced through interpersonal relations at multiple scales, in relations between racialized bodies and within racialized families and nations. Throughout, I show that race itself is relative, formed through genealogies of racial inheritance, relations of racialized domesticity, and in larger structures of racial belonging. To show how race is not individual but formed in relation, I turn to interracial kinship, reading narratives in which we can more clearly observe race’s directional flow between people, across generational time, and through ever-expanding spatial scales.

Unpacking the construction of race as relative is this book’s main project. I mean the term “relative” to refer both to the production of race in relation—as constructed not within individual bodies but in the relationships between them—and to its production through kinship ties—though not necessarily in exclusively biological or heteronormative genealogies of racial descent. The process of race-making not only transfers race from a genealogical past to future descendants, but differently, through nonbiological relations of adoption, “horizontal” relations of sexual kinship, and “backward” genealogies of racial reflection from children to parents or “circular” relations by which race is constructed and reconstructed *ad infinitum*. These genealogies might best be understood as creating a “queer temporality” of racialization. Race is still relative in these alternative genealogies, as the figures I discuss form racial identifications that affect how they construe kinship relations and vice versa. This theory of racialization effectively reimagines the relationship between race and family. It also reimagines the spaces of racialization as happening not simply within the body and through racial self-articulation, but also through familial recognition. Race is produced—and reproduced—in relation, in the connections between bodies, in domestic spaces, through literary genre, and in practices of racialized reading and naming.



## Relative, Queer Genealogies of Race-Making

*Relative Races* describes a theory of racial formation that acknowledges both the understanding of race-making as a taxonomic project of comparison and the importance of kinship relations for assigning bodies to racialized groups. The term “racialization” appears throughout my project to refer to the various processes of race-making I discuss here. I use this term to distinguish the processes of race-making from their end product: race. Different processes of racialization may work in tandem with or even against one another, and their potential conflict reveals the nature of race as constructed—as historically comprehensible though not entirely predictable, as complex, as mythos, and as entirely real in its import and impact on racialized bodies and relations of kinship and power. Passed through genealogies of inheritance across generations of history, race is not essential to this inheritance but constructed by it. Here we see how race itself does not produce but is produced by societal relations in various historical settings. Race is constructed, though this fact does not make it any less real.

Expanding the scale of comprehending race beyond the individual shows how race is relational rather than generational. Race is relational, or “relative,” in that it is not simply embodied by an individual but constructed as racialized bodies are placed into relation with or comparison to one another. Race is also relative in the sense that it is structured by and through kinship relations in the texts I discuss. Because race is not simply inherited, relatives may be assigned different races, mixed-race people are racialized in ways that ignore some relations and prioritize others, and nonbiological relatives may still inform one another’s racialization. These differently directional genealogies might be understood as creating a “queer temporality” of racialization that refuses what Elizabeth Freeman calls chrononormativity, “the use of time to organize individual bodies toward maximum productivity.”<sup>8</sup> My reading of racial genealogy as directional takes up this model of both nonnormative time and kinship. Wary of prioritizing biological kinship, I instead read kinship’s different trajectories of inheritance. Unlike notions of genealogical nationalism, which Holly Jackson describes as “a symbolic property passed down the family line, a vertical inheritance from their fathers,” racial belonging does not necessarily follow the same lines of inheritance.<sup>9</sup> Despite the predominance of heterosexuality in the texts I discuss here, characters’ racial reproduction does not always follow chrononormative genealogies of descent. Rather, we can observe genealogies that resist what I call “downward” trajectories of racial inheritance in

favor of differently directional genealogies, such as Désirée's apparent inheritance of race from her child.

My use of the term “queer” to describe race's genealogies of construction and reconstruction describes processes of racialization that cannot be explained by solely heteropatriarchal models of inheritance. Just as they do not follow normative chronologies, neither are genealogies of interracial kinship necessarily patrilineal. The notion of hypodescent—the “one drop rule” for designating someone with any amount of “Black” ancestry as Black, regardless of other racial genealogies—itself does not follow a patrilineal model. In this respect, hypodescent is, perhaps, the dominant framework in which race's queer genealogies operate in the United States. The notorious law of the Virginia colony, *partus sequitur ventrum*, tells us that the child follows the condition of the mother. Just as a mother's enslaved status alone determined her child's, only one parent's identification as Black is sufficient to racialize children as such. In its most ironic sense, we might regard hypodescent as a queer genealogy of race that oddly aligns with Black feminism in its resistance to patriarchal and even heterosexual notions of race's biological transfer. This understanding of hypodescent resists the antiblackness inherent in the assumption that inherited Blackness is only or necessarily oppressive. My Black feminist reading of hypodescent is clearest in chapter 4; here I discuss anti-passing literature, in which Black mothers are prioritized over white fathers. Even where we might purport to trace race through a biological mother and father, the genealogy of racialization refuses this heteronormative structure in US law and custom, prioritizing or excluding certain parental genealogies in favor of others. The result is not necessarily what Hortense Spillers calls “kinlessness” or the loss of the mother described by Saidiya Hartman, but sometimes results in a prioritization of Black and Native mothers over other kin in narratives of mixed-race women and mixed-race children whose racialization both uses and resists tropes of white womanhood in order to resist white supremacy.<sup>10</sup>

My discussion of the inherent queerness of racialization in interracial kinship follows recent work in Black queer feminist theory, whose readings of racial theory recognize the relations of race that I most want to discuss. Alexis Pauline Gumbs refers to the “queer” workings of racialization via hypodescent, writing that “[b]ecoming black is queer in that it is not based on purity, and it is not reproducing a narrative about what blackness itself is.”<sup>11</sup> Darieck Scott similarly notes the “queerness of blackness,” writing that “the term *queer*” emphasizes a liberatory dissolution of fixed boundaries between genders, sexualities, and races.”<sup>12</sup> Notions of racial biologism, on the other

hand, are inherently heteronormative, prioritizing biological reproduction and futurity, and ignoring other forms of race-making and kinship-making. Even though race usually becomes visible via something like familial genealogies of racial resemblance, it does not always do so. That race is not necessarily visible (even while it usually is) reveals the ultimate nature of race as queerly unpredictable and sometimes queerly radical. In their explorations of race and family, nineteenth-century US texts often represent the differently queer genealogies through which relational race-making happens. Enabled by the concept of relative racialization, students and scholars are invited to take up the ways that the queerness of racialization calls into question heteronormative narratives about race and race-making more generally.

Like the genealogically queer notion of “hypodescent,” racial temporalities do not necessarily make linear or logical sense. They operate in simultaneously competing ways. Resisting both essentialist notions of race’s permanence and, to a lesser extent, ideas of racial movement and “fluidity,” I want to suggest racialization as neither static nor as shifting between racial positions, but as necessarily contradictory in its construction. This understanding of race as contradictory is related to an understanding of race’s temporalities as illogical. This illogic is inherent to white supremacy’s ever-reaching effects on processes of racialization that sometimes but do not always follow predictable patterns. As Colin Dayan aptly explains, “Bad logic makes good racism.”<sup>13</sup> I do not mean to argue that what I call queer temporalities are themselves necessarily illogical, but that illogic may follow from simultaneously operating and sometimes competing racializations, rendering them unpredictable. John Ernest writes that “to understand race it is useful to be guided by chaos theory, a theory devoted to the patterns created by complex and seemingly irregular systems.”<sup>14</sup> My reading of racial formation similarly recognizes that race is complex and, at times, chaotically confusing. This said, the arguments I make here about racialization are not absolutist or even conditional, but occasional, as all arguments about how racialization happens in the United States must be, to some extent. As cultural construction rather than essentialist truth, race-making is not always logical. Though often—or even usually—predictable, race is not always so. Race does not always follow the same patterns; other linear paths, other genealogies are possible. Moreover, the moments of race-making and re-racialization I discuss here are not necessarily permanent; they are not all-encompassing or definitive. But they reveal something about the nature of race’s construction in their potential transience and unpredictability. They show how other racial structures (and whiteness, in particular) are also precarious. As race is constructed, it must

be continually reconstructed, remade and rearticulated, sometimes with a (not necessarily logical) difference.

Race's illogic and precariousness are not to be confused, however, with its impotence. Race is indeed a powerful and significant social construction. While race has often been called a myth or a fiction, this characterization risks masking the resonance of lived, racialized experience—particularly the experience of racism. Race is, indeed, real and powerful, even if fictional. In this, unpacking the literary metaphor becomes necessary. Like the literary genre with which race is compared when it is described as “fiction,” its constructed or contrived nature has real, material effects on our understanding of and experiences in the world. And in this reality, race is experienced in relation—as narratives of othering and belonging, articulated against and alongside additional racial realities. Race is constructed in the spaces of relation to others' experiences of race, often in relations of kinship. In this dependence upon relation, racialization is very much like literary genre. Both are best “read” in context, in comparisons that become recognizable but may depart from a dominant pattern. Throughout this book, I “read” racialization's generic, relational underpinnings within their sociohistorical and literary contexts.

When we understand racialization as constructed rather than essential, we can understand race as cultural—we might even say literary or linguistic. Practices of ascribing human bodies to racialized groups are not unlike practices of arranging texts into literary genres. While both have something to do with the apparent content or appearance of bodies/texts themselves, they also have to do with relation, how bodies/texts fit in with larger collections of bodies/texts that are somehow “like” them. In both cases, there are sometimes compelling reasons to categorize bodies/texts otherwise. A body/text might bear features of multiple races/genres. Or, it might not fit well with the available categories at all, calling these categories themselves into question. When we see race constructed in nonnormative ways, this presents problems of genre—problems of narrating the genealogies by which race travels and the relationships that themselves become racialized. In dealing with these textual difficulties, I also address some of the problems of race-making itself. The compulsion for singular classifications of bodies/texts is compelling and useful. It allows for things like identification, coherency, and historicization. But to fully understand how race or genre work, we must understand them as constructed, not natural or necessary, but human-made, created within specific historical and cultural contexts and produced, in part, by the various texts that attempt to represent or explain them.

Literature has long been a site for theorizing race. Throughout this project, I attend to race's literary nature. In my first chapter, this point becomes clear, as US productions of *Othello* make the play an urtext for exploring particularly US American racist anxieties. I discuss racialization as it inheres differently in different literary genres (in chapters 2 and 5), as certain types of kinship that have been described as "fictive" (in chapter 4), and in the language we use to describe racialized relationships and the metaphors of race itself (in chapters 3 and 6, respectively). Just as discussions of who falls into which category of racial classification have always been in flux, so has the language we use to talk about race. In my movement between genre and language as different, simultaneously operating scales for writing about—and modes for theorizing—race, I also acknowledge the limitations of dominant, historical, essentialist racial discourse for discussing race's complexity, construction, and shifting terrain.

Race is constructed, in part, through the language we use to describe it. Richard Dyer notes the stability of the term "white" as a linguistic symbol, rather than as a descriptor of skin tone.<sup>15</sup> John Ernest similarly reminds us, "What is white about white people . . . is not the color of their skin (which is not, after all, white) but rather the historical situation that has made 'white' bodies such able predictors of experience, understanding, and access to privilege and cultural authority."<sup>16</sup> The seemingly benign terminology of race-as-color masks histories of racial privilege and racialized violence. The metaphorization of race as color has often coalesced around and thereby reinforced a black-white binary. The resonances of this binary become particularly clear, for example, in my discussions of blackface, and of mixed-race Black people. This binary also complicates readings of race and visibility in many of the images I discuss and that are reproduced in this book, which appear quite literally in black-and-white—a medium of racial representation that is inherently nonmimetic. Articulating race's significance beyond this surface-level euphemism, distancing oneself from historically racist language, reappropriating racial terms for redefined uses, and creating new terms to discuss racial phenomena are also some of the ways race is constructed. The relationship between language and race is essential to this project, evidenced by my discussion of some of the ways race-making happens through the very means we use to write and talk about race. Several of the texts I discuss here deal directly with these problems of discussing race—with naming it—as well as with the problems of naming and narrating the kinship relations through which racialization happens—for example, when our language system prioritizes certain kinds of genealogies and kinship

relations, leaving us with inadequate words for naming others, a point I discuss at length in chapters 3 and 4.

While this book acknowledges and interrogates problems of racial essentialism, the language available to discuss race is often problematic, and problematically limiting. I recognize the fact that I cannot entirely escape these limitations of the language available for discussing race. In addition to the term “African American,” I also use the term “Black” to refer to people of African descent more broadly. At times I also refer to “mixed-race Black people,” using the former as a modifier of the latter in order to describe a specific and particular way of being Black. This registers the fact that such people more often than not in the nineteenth-century United States (and afterward) have identified as Black rather than as white and generally did not regard the category “mixed race” as a racial designation of its own.<sup>17</sup> The theory of racial hypodescent that I treat throughout this book explains why this is the case. I use the words “Indian” as well as “Native” to refer to Indigenous peoples of North America when I am not referring to people’s or characters’ specific tribal affiliations. Because nineteenth-century discourses often included “Indian” in literary, popular, scientific, and legal racial classifications, this category becomes important for understanding Native people’s collective racialization in the United States, even while we must understand and acknowledge the more complex relations of kinship and sovereignty that are masked by this form of racialization, points to which I return in chapter 5. My emphasis on the treatment of white-Black and white-Native interracialism is in accordance with the dominant discourses of the century and the conversations around which race was constructed in this white-centered landscape of US racism.<sup>18</sup> At times I also use phrases like “nonwhite people” and “people of color” in my discussions of people of various racial identities who have been collectively racialized outside of (and in relation to) whiteness.

Race is constructed in a maelstrom of social convergences, but it is also experiential, lived. To be racialized is to experience, to be subjected to forms of racial privilege or oppression—to live in racial relation. In the nineteenth century, to be racialized as nonwhite was often to be harmed by settler colonialist and/or antiblack violence. Racial embodiment is a state of being in the world, not necessarily of having racial materiality or performing race, although these are also often involved in racial being. Race is identifying or being identified as a racialized being, but it is not only individual. Race is collective. It is not constructed in a personal vacuum, but, like language and literary genre, through a complex set of relations at various simultaneous scales. Race’s comparative nature is one reason why Black/white racial

dualism persists in US culture. This is a shorthand, a lazy but convenient compression of race from the complexities of racial relations into a white/nonwhite dichotomy that extracts only the position of racial supremacy and disregards the nuances of other “nonwhite” positions and relations. This dualism, however, also draws attention to the importance of antiblackness to US histories of structural racism. In a white supremacist society, racial dualism is also what structures power only in relation to its highest wielder. While this simplistically reduces various positions of nonwhiteness, it can sometimes be useful for understanding white supremacy and the spectrum of various relations of racialization to whiteness.

Defined by comparison, race is also imagined to be somehow perceptible—often via visualization. But what notions of “colorblind” racism elude in their reduction of race to color is that even in the midst of anxieties regarding racial ambiguity, race has continually been imagined as material—as biological. Scientists and others in the US have debated the nature of race as well as its location—in quanta of imagined “blood” according to the 1705 Virginia Colony or the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, in the “scarf-skin,” or even the “bile,” as Thomas Jefferson posits in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, or in the size and shape of the skull as Samuel Morton argues in *Crania Americana* and *Crania Aegyptiaca*.<sup>19</sup> More recently, Henry Louis Gates’s PBS series *Finding Your Roots* reads race into DNA—via genealogies of biological relations. Such understandings of race illustrate the racial logic of biologism, as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “the interpretation of human life from a strictly biological point of view,” and as can be particularly found in the scientific racism that emerges as the dominant discourse of race in the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> The idea that race is simply a product of biological, genealogical descent also shows nineteenth-century discourses of kinship are dependent upon what Eric Cheyfitz refers to as a “bio-logic” of racial formation.<sup>21</sup> Kinship, however, is more complex than biological genealogy. As Judith Butler recognizes “it is not possible to separate questions of kinship from property relations (and conceiving persons as property), and from the fictions of ‘bloodline’ as well as the national and racial interests by which these lines are sustained.”<sup>22</sup> To reduce race to biology is also to disregard its intersections with other social formations such as class and nation, as well as its relations to sexuality, kinship, legitimacy, sovereignty, and inheritance. The bio-logic of racial essentialism suggests race’s trajectories as inevitable, wholly predictive of racial genealogies and their trajectory through expanding scales of body, family, and nation. This much is evident from twenty-first-century attention to DNA tracing, and all of its racialized implications for

imagined places of a person's genealogical origin in some geographical-racial past. Kimberly TallBear shows how Native DNA is best understood as "co-constituted with U.S. race categories, which themselves are coproduced with Euro-American colonial practices, including eighteenth- through twentieth-century U.S. race laws, policy, and programs."<sup>23</sup> However, while race may be visible, visual, material, geographical, genealogical, and cultural, its biology is actually miniscule and suspect. The racialization of DNA shows us surprisingly little about how race "works" in historical contexts. However, such DNA tests are revelatory precisely because racialization is not an entirely predictable phenomenon.

Departing from strictly biologist understandings of race, Katy Chiles discusses a prior era of race-making in early America, in which racial difference was not imagined to be "fixed in nature" (as Jefferson held) but by its impermanence, its status as "transformable."<sup>24</sup> Chiles describes race as "potentially mutable" because "it was thought to be an exterior bodily trait, incrementally produced by environmental factors (such as climate, food, and mode of living) and continuously subject to change."<sup>25</sup> My own discussion of later racial formation—and, more particularly, the ongoing process I here term "racial (re)formation"—refers instead to race's changeability through different factors—relations. If race is a social construct, then it is a relational one. And as race cannot entirely escape its history of biological underpinnings, it has to do with kinship.

My theorization of race as relative also situates itself between the persistent notions—and legal imperatives—of race as inherited through genealogical lines of descent and theories of race's construction in various historical moments and social spaces. Kinship and racialization emerge not through monolithic ideologies but in structures of feeling. Both speak to the affective elements inherent in relations: who belongs with whom and how and with what responsibilities. Mark Rifkin describes these affective elements as "genealogies of sensation" in which "peoplehood inheres in forms of feeling."<sup>26</sup> By extending kinship beyond the biological, nuclear family nonwhite people have not always conformed to normative white models of feeling. White supremacists therefore represented African Americans and Native Americans as emotionally inappropriate in their feelings of kinship—as uncaring in the face of familial loss or improperly extending kinship beyond the heteronormative nuclear family. The connections between kinship and racialization also suggest conflicts of affect and political alignment. Christina Sharpe argues that for white people to show anti-racist solidarity, "One must refuse to repair a familial rift on the bodies cast out as not kin."<sup>27</sup> The connection be-



tween kinship recognition and racialization shows how racial construction often depends upon the articulation of relations—racial figuring not only within a sociohistorical context, but in terms of articulating (recognizing, denying, and re-forming) family relationships. Thus, individual and familial racial production and (re)production extend to the larger implications for and project of theorizing and retheorizing race, racial construction, and (re)construction. This project seeks to recognize the collapsed scale and recursive teleology of race-making at the respective levels of body, family, and nation, the connections between which become most visible in narratives of interracial kinship.

### Interracial Kinship and Racial (Re)Production

During the 1858 political campaign season, Democrats in Indiana played-up concerns that Republicans were “amalgamationists” in a demonstration involving young white women in white dresses carrying banners that read “Fathers, save us from n[—] husbands!”<sup>28</sup> Apart from the assumption that white women are universally desirable and therefore the potential objects of sexual desire for Black men, this rhetoric also assumes that white women are not subjects capable of desiring Black men, and therefore must be “saved” from interracial sexual encounters that were categorized definitively as rapes. This understanding of white women designates whiteness, as Elise Lemire explains, as “an identity people can only claim if they have certain sexual race preferences.”<sup>29</sup> A matter of sexual preference or “taste,” then, also works to racialize these subjects. More simply put, interracial desire risks racializing white women because it does not seek to preserve racial segregation, separation, or “purity.” It racializes them because it makes them (like *Désirée*) unable to reproduce white children.

My discussion of racialization is premised on the understanding that race-making has as much to do with the construction of whiteness as it does with other kinds of racial construction. Discussions of white womanhood, in particular, in the American nineteenth century have primarily emphasized the notions of essentialized biological, genealogically inherited race that I seek to critique. Because the figure of the white woman has become central to narratives of normative, genealogical racial reproduction, I give particular attention to texts that upset this rhetoric of white womanhood in nineteenth-century American literary culture. In relations of interracial kinship, the figure of the white woman ceases to be a supposed preserver of racial “purity,” but becomes a racially malleable and precarious figure who might be

re-racialized through interracial kinship relations. Racist anxieties like those expressed by anti-amalgamation discourses about white womanhood imagine race as something potentially transferrable to white women subjects. White women are thereby positioned as especially susceptible to “receiving” race (a point I will discuss at length in chapter 1) and (as we see in the power relations between Armand and Désirée) somehow hold more responsibility than white men for reproducing race. In short, genealogical notions of racial inheritance are upset when we look at white women figures in interracial relationships of sexual kinship or childbearing. This focus on white womanhood shows us how race is constructed by illustrating how whiteness is—and isn’t—reproduced. The importance of racial reproduction becomes visible when white reproduction fails. While white supremacy is dependent upon exclusions that define “white” people only in relation to people who are not white, it is also dependent upon the ability of whiteness to reproduce itself. In her discussion of the devaluation of Black reproduction, Dorothy Roberts writes that “I have also noticed that America is obsessed with creating and preserving genetic ties between white parents and their children.”<sup>30</sup> When whiteness fails (or refuses, as I discuss in later examples) to preserve or perpetuate white reproduction despite these genetic ties, race’s queer genealogies become visible.

As we will see throughout this study, racialization does not always fall under the purview of white men. This fact works against the usual practices of scientific taxonomization by which white men have debated the nature of racial difference and the characteristics, relations between, and even the number of different “races of men.” The converging branches of scientific inquiry in which race has been parsed is, itself, a social structure of race-making. Based on white supremacist assumptions and what would later come to be understood as pseudoscientific methodologies, nineteenth-century racial science depended upon structures of white, patriarchal power as an origin point for scientific knowledge.<sup>31</sup> Racialization has, historically, been a gendered affair. Jennifer Morgan notes how “enslaved women experienced the explicit and implicit claims upon their wombs” in the forced reproduction of enslaved bodies.<sup>32</sup> Though not a comparable burden, the responsibility of white women to reproduce white people fold the same logics of racial reproduction and white supremacy. Chopin’s story, for example, first appeared in *Vogue* with the title “The Father of Désirée’s Baby,” on January 14, 1893. The alternate title suggests a question about where the force of racialization comes from: does Désirée’s baby re-racialize her, or does Armand? That white men are a force of power in race-making is clear and, inasmuch as

Armand is the origin of crafting Désirée's race, he does so from his position of white male power. But, in the differences between Armand and Désirée, we see how white women, specifically, become racially precarious; they risk re-racialization precisely because it is mothers (and not fathers) who are held responsible for (re)producing race.

The "relative races" of the historical figures and literary characters I discuss here are therefore complexly organized around the power of interracial kinship relations to racialize white women in particular. My focus on white women takes up a thread of American Studies (exhibited by scholars such as Amy Kaplan, Linda Kerber, Karen Sanchez-Eppler, and Shirley Samuels) that positions the white woman as a definitive site for racial construction in nineteenth-century US popular and literary culture. As literal reproducers of whiteness, white women have most often been discussed as figures whose primary function is to keep the racial Other outside the domestic spaces of the home, family, and nation. *Relative Races* reads the rhetoric of white womanhood when interracial kinship relations come into play. In readings of personal narratives, novels, plays, stories, poems, and images, I show how the figure of the white woman is formed through readings of their relative racialization—that is, by reading how their race is re-formed in relation to their differently racialized relatives. In interracial kinship relations, white women do not simply reproduce whiteness, but instead construct race through kinship ties that depart from normative heterosexual genealogies. The kinds of kinship I discuss here are "queer" even when heterosexual, as they refuse heteronormative genealogies. As Roderick Ferguson describes, nonwhite kinship formations have often "violated a racialized ideal of heteropatriarchal nuclearity."<sup>33</sup> This is not to say that this kinship is not reproductive, but that this reproduction is differently reproductive than the reproduction of bio-logic. Race might be produced and reproduced across generations, but also within the same body. I am interested in this project not simply in the reproduction of bodies in kinship formation, but in the reproduction of race itself.

In this book's theorization of relative races, I turn especially toward the interventions of work in Black feminism, Native studies, and queer theory. These theoretical perspectives offer the critiques of kinship and genealogical time that are necessary for understanding ways of race-making that challenge settler colonialist, white supremacist, patriarchal, and heteronormative frameworks with which racialization has most often been imagined in the United States. The thread by which race and genealogy are linked is also fundamentally a matter of time. I therefore draw upon the

work of theorists who reconceptualize time's lineage, particularly in queer theorizations of time by writers such as Lee Edelman, Dana Luciano, Peter Coviello, José Muñoz, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, and Mark Rifkin. Scholarship by Katy Chiles, Alys Eve Weinbaum, Sharon Patricia Holland, Christina Sharpe, and Alexis Pauline Gumbs also deals with time, asking readers to reimagine race's trajectories, calling up race's past lives while looking toward contemporary understandings of race's meaning and efficacy. The most pressing critiques of race also dovetail with—and are inextricable from—critiques of kinship, as can be seen in the work of Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, Nancy Bentley, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, and Holly Jackson.

The most foundational critique of kinship at the heart of this project involves recognizing a tendency away from white, patrilineal genealogies in the texts I read. Writing on mixed-race Black heroines in African American literature, P. Gabrielle Foreman has critiqued how some scholars' "overemphasis on patrilineal descent and an identification with and projection of white desire . . . continually revisits the paternal and the patriarchal, the phallic and juridical Law of the (white) Father."<sup>34</sup> Such readings fail to recognize the ways that nineteenth-century African American women writers, in particular, centered motherhood in their narratives and theorizations of racialization. My discussion of race's matrilineal and nonheteronormative genealogies builds upon the work of scholars of African American women writers such as P. Gabrielle Foreman, Frances Smith Foster, Carla Peterson, and Ann DuCille, who recognize the complex ways such writers theorized race, particularly with regard to mixed-race Black people. The importance of Black women to these theorizations of race—both as writers and thinkers who theorized the complex connections between race, sexuality, and kinship and as important reproducers of race—cannot be overstated.<sup>35</sup> Even where I read white women's inability or unwillingness to reproduce whiteness, Black women's racial reproduction looms as a counter to white racial reproduction and the reproduction of white supremacy. Black women's reproduction—even when forced under conditions of enslavement—has been met with Black feminist resistance to white norms. Such resistance is not unlike race's occasional resistance to normative genealogies for reproducing whiteness. The complex intertwining of race, sexuality, and kinship evident in the study of nineteenth-century African American women follows threads that become visible in work of Black queer studies, by scholars such as Roderick Ferguson, Cathy Cohen, Darieck Scott, and Robert Reid-Pharr. Ferguson explains that "African American culture has historically been deemed contrary

to the norms of heterosexuality and patriarchy.”<sup>36</sup> So too, I add, has non-white racialization.

Although this book is invested primarily in nineteenth-century American Studies, it relies heavily on critical race theory as well as nineteenth-century African American Studies and Native studies more specifically in its discussions of race and racialization, turning to anti-racist, anti-colonialist critiques that are not new, but forms of resistance that have been foundational to the history of race-making in the United States. Reading literary genres such as the frontier romance, abolitionist literature, and literatures of race, reunion, and Reconstruction, visual depictions of interracial families in book illustrations and political cartoons, and essays and legal rulings on interracial kinship relations, this project also extends beyond models of white womanhood. I explore the intersections of African American and Native American identities with whiteness as a means of theorizing how mixed- or ambiguously raced characters function in literary and cultural texts.

The queer futurity of racial reproduction becomes significant in another way when we understand that this differently directional genealogy of race upsets teleologies of racial mixture. Like abolitionists who would prioritize mixed-race heroines in garnering sympathy for enslaved people, later writers in Critical Mixed Race Studies would be critiqued for the seeming antiblackness inherent in the articulation of mixed-race identification, as well as for popular assumptions that the production of mixed-race bodies will someday render racism impossible. I return to these critiques of racial mixture as antiblack and as reconciliation in the conclusion. The field of Critical Mixed Race Studies is one of many fields of interdisciplinary intersection for this project. This field’s overwhelmingly presentist focus, however, often relegates its discussions of interracial kinship to twentieth- and twenty-first-century contexts. I hope to add this project to the work of scholars such as Tavia Nyong’o, Werner Sollors, Elise Lemire, Karen Woods Weierman, Teresa Zackodnik, Cassandra Jackson, Martha Hodes, Eve Allegra Raimon, Peggy Pascoe, and Greg Carter, who extend their treatment of racial mixing into earlier periods of US history.

Antiblack racism is, of course, at the heart of these discourses of racialization. My project therefore focuses not on the racist origins of racialization via hypodescent, however, but on its anti-racist potential. Rather than “depoliticize blackness” or effect a “slippage . . . between race and racism” that Nyong’o observes in histories of US racism, the anti-racist potential of race-making depends upon embracing, rather than rejecting nonwhite racialization.<sup>37</sup> This retooling of racialization away from its racist uses is perhaps

most visible in the long nineteenth century in Native American theorizations of belonging and family that reject the problematic “bio-logic” of racial (racist) essentialism and in anti-passing literary responses to the “tragic mulatto/a” trope. While I discuss the settler colonialist production of race as well as Native understandings of nonbiological kinship relations, antiblackness looms throughout this project because normative models of racialization came to prioritize notions of black/white dualism in the nineteenth-century United States. This reification of racial dualism was accompanied by assimilationist projects of Native genocide and land theft. There is no neat separation of the ways racist ideologies build upon both stolen bodies and stolen land, which represent two scalar sites of race-making, a point I will discuss further in chapters 5 and 6. Still, inasmuch as Blackness becomes a touchstone for discourses of race-making, its resonance seeps even into the problematic racialization of the Indigenous people of North America. This becomes visible in the genealogy of captivity discourse and even in Mary Jemison’s narrative. As Toni Morrison notes, American literature and Americanness—and I would argue, American models of racialization—have been overwhelmingly shaped by their relation to ideas about Black people.<sup>38</sup>

This project is, primarily, a study of how race is revealed to follow these unexpected constructions in the literary and visual culture of the nineteenth-century United States. My texts, correspondingly, come from this period, with some important exceptions. At various points, I turn to twentieth- and twenty-first-century adaptations and historical fictionalizations of earlier texts, periods, and events, reading these alongside the nineteenth-century literature that remains at the heart of this study. The most significant of these turns to later writing appears at the end of chapters 1 and 4, and in the conclusion, in readings of twenty-first-century adaptations and historical fiction by Toni Morrison. I read these later pieces of writing not simply as literature to put into useful conversation with the older texts I discuss (and particularly to the long history of African American women’s fiction writing), but—in keeping with my earlier discussion of race as theorized through literature—as theorizations of race and kinship which reveal the continued resonances of the themes I discuss. As Barbara Christian has noted, people of color’s theorizing has often appeared “in narrative forms.”<sup>39</sup> In truth, African American creative writers theorized and continue to theorize race, sexuality, and kinship in ways that resonated and continue to resonate with contemporary discussions of race’s importance. In this sense, Morrison’s creative writing is in conversation with not only the various theorizations of race present in the nineteenth-century texts I discuss but also with the other Black feminist

work that is central to this project, by scholars including Spillers, Hartman, Sharpe, Gumbs, Foreman, Patricia Hill Collins, Cathy Cohen, Joyce Green MacDonald, Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, and Ruha Benjamin.

These departures from the nineteenth century extend my theorization of race forward to the present, noting the continued resonance of the ways race was imagined in these earlier texts. Race's complexity, we can see from this, does not follow distinct periodizations demarking popular understandings of race, but trajectories that extend into (and sometimes compete with) new theorizations, confusingly overlapping with one another to form the larger web of race's complexities. The long history of theorizing what we call "race" extends from the eighteenth century through to the twenty-first. Like Critical Mixed-Race Studies, the broader field of Critical Race Studies, in its focus on its various contemporary moments for understanding the effects of race and racism, at times dismisses earlier instances of race-making and making sense of race. While presentist priorities are crucial for a world in which racism continues to create and sustain racial inequality at every scale, the short-sightedness of some contemporary race theory proves detrimental to understanding the sometimes archaic ways in which race continues to function. I do not reject this history of theorizing race, of course, but seek to build upon it by fleshing out yet another element of race's complexity. I take seriously the work of writers who chart race's social construction in particular. Writers such as Michael Omi, Howard Winant, David Roediger, Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Nell Irvin Painter have charted the specific historical and social moments in which race is formed. My own historicist project also takes up "the sociohistorical process[es] by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed."<sup>40</sup> My focus on kinship relations looks at just one avenue for racial construction, but a powerful one.

### Romance, Reproduction, Residency

*Relative Races*'s organization reflects what Mark Rifkin names as three elements of kinship: "residency, reproduction, and romance."<sup>41</sup> My trajectory follows these elements in reverse order, through three sections that will focus on sexual kinship, kinship's genealogies of reproduction, and the domestic spaces in which kinship inheres. This path simultaneously traces and challenges the arc of racialization from individual racialization and through sexual coupling, reproduction, and the racialization of family and nation. How race is made is also a matter of how race is read as residing in individual bodies, as following genealogies between bodies, and as dwelling

within in domestic spaces. *Relative Races*'s three sections therefore follows this pathway of racial construction, from its legibility upon and inside the body, through generational relations of race's varied directional movement, and toward its suffusion within the domestic, cultural, and national spaces in which race has become imbued.

The book is divided into three sections, each comprised of two chapters: "Romance: Sexual Kinship," "Reproduction: Genealogies of (Re)Racialization" and "Residency: Domestic Racial Relations." These sections trace the literary and cultural resonances of interracial kinship from relations of interracial sexual kinship to depictions of interracial motherhood and nonnormative genealogies of relatedness and, finally, through depictions of interracial families and their implications for narratives of national domesticity. Rather than taking a chronological approach to texts, the project moves through the teleology of sexuality, family, and nation showing how the texts I discuss—even as they appear in what are, on the surface, heteronormative structures of racialization—push against normative heterosexual and patrilineal genealogies that rely on biologically constructed notions of racialization at each of these expanding scales. In *Relative Races*, white womanhood is not necessarily inherited according to these structures of kinship, but kinship relations do often create relations of racial belonging in other, non-genealogical directions, having effects that extend beyond biological notions of race and from notions of race's location in individual bodies to racial production and reproduction in ever expanding nexuses of racialized relations.

The historical figures and literary characters I discuss here exhibit race's queer genealogies of kinship, following non-heteronormative trajectories of racial reproduction. The processes of race-making that each chapter takes up varies, representing possible genealogies of relational racial construction. In some texts, assumedly white women are re-racialized by a seeming metaphor of race's transferability, as Othello's blackface makeup rubs off on Desdemona, making her "begrimed and black." Much like Désirée, Mary King is "read" as a mixed-race heroine by virtue of her mixed-race family's fugitivity. Iola Leroy aligns herself with her Black mother's family, rejecting her history of unknowing passing. Roxy switches her baby for that of her enslaver, effectively re-racializing both children by virtue of her relationships to them. Mary Jemison, though born white, is adopted by a Seneca family and thereby becomes a Seneca woman. Literatures of national family race-drama illustrate the different scales in which race is made, simultaneously racializing at the level of body, home, and nation, and creating race's circular teleology of (re)production and (re)construction. These cases of race's



different directionalities show how race might be constructed through kinship relationships, though not in the expected genealogical ways. Moreover, the expanding scale of romance, reproduction, and residency indicates race's ever-expanding stakes.

*Relative Races* shows, in part, how some nineteenth-century texts shifted the expectations of racialization away from the reproduction of whiteness and toward a model of white womanhood that was able to produce structures of multiracial family. This model of white womanhood and racial reproduction illustrates the possibilities of racial construction and reconstruction that white supremacists imagined to be most dangerous. The characters I discuss offer a counter-narrative of white women's relationship to race and racism that shows why depictions of white supremacist and separatist womanhood became so important to dominant cultural constructions of white supremacy and the nationalist exclusion of nonwhite people. Recognizing this anti-racist potential in white women's racial relations decenters white womanhood read only within the racist models that have dominated US literary culture from texts like Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative to Kathryn Stockett's *The Help*. Attention to different models of white women's interracial relations allows us to see that white supremacist tropes of white womanhood are not the only ones available, even in a nineteenth-century context.

My first section shows how nineteenth-century discussions of interracial sexual relations evidence contradictory assumptions about white feminine "nature" in their readings of the effects of interracial desire on white women. In her *Appeal in Favor of Americans Called Africans*, Lydia Maria Child questions white racist assumptions about a general "repugnance between the two races, founded in the laws of nature," citing the existence of "interracial" desire as proof that such desire is not "unnatural," but dependent upon individual inclinations.<sup>42</sup> Characterizing interracial desire instead as a "matter of taste," Child individualizes the notion of desire in a way that this racist rhetoric cannot. My first two chapters take up white women in interracial kinship relationships from the iconic to the individual, showing how white women's interracial desire was imagined to change the nature of white womanhood itself. Both the "blackening" of Desdemona and the refiguring of Mary King as a mixed-race heroine work against this notion of racialization, positioning these stories' white women "beyond the pale" of whiteness itself.

The extent to which sexual relationships are racializing can be seen also in the reverse of imagining Desdemona and Mary King as marked by their relation to Blackness: in Ellen and William Craft's disguise and escape. Because

Ellen could “pass” for white and her husband could not, her relationship to him needed to be refigured in order to effect their passing. Specifically, Ellen’s whiteness depends upon her distance from any assumption of sexual kinship with William. Here we see how race intersects not only with class and gender, and ability, but also with sexuality. Ellen’s disguise as white becomes more effective if she presents herself as belonging to a certain class, and she is removed from having to write and to have too much conversation by virtue of her passing as disabled. Her gender passing upsets a possible search for a man and a woman traveling together. But also through this re-gendering, we see relations of heterosexuality refigured. By assuming the role of William’s enslaver, Ellen performs a reimagined relationship to her husband—one in which her sexual relationship to him is not assumed. A white woman would seem out of place traveling with a Black man whom she did not own. But in a world of racial ambiguity, this out-of-placeness would also signal questions about this apparently “white” woman’s race. The couple’s disguise, then, is not only Ellen’s dress and her class/ability/gender presentation, but Ellen and William’s relationship to one another.

The relationship between Ellen and William Craft is visualized on the cover of this book, which features portraits of each, as well as portraits of some of their children.<sup>43</sup> Represented alone, Ellen Craft might easily be “read” as a white woman, but viewed in these relations to her more obviously, visibly Black family members, she becomes more legible as a mixed-race Black woman even though she was able to pass as white. The racializing effects of this relationship are such that Ellen can become white only as William’s enslaver, not as his spouse. Although Blackness is not always visible, both Ellen’s and William’s race is relative; it is constructed in comparison and in the space of their interpersonal relationships. Even as these anxieties about how race might travel through interpersonal relationships reveals how race was imagined to work, narratives of interracial romance such as William Allen and Mary King’s often focus on individual concerns and rights, displacing the more expansive logic of racist amalgamation anxieties. The narrow scope of “interracial” desire in such narratives indicates the limitations of these individualistic accounts for challenging the larger implications that lie at the foundation of racist discourse. Examining when interracial desire is permissible and when it is denied indicates the limits and potential of these stories to work against racist models of racial futurity. Addressing interracial desire only as a matter of taste serves as an insufficient response to the racist logic that attends to larger implications for the future of racial genealogies.

My second section treats racialization as intergenerational by reading how race's queer genealogies work upon mixed-race heroines and in their complex, "kinfull" relations of racialization.<sup>44</sup> Désirée's baby enacts a fear central to passing literature—that Blackness will become visible in future generations, thereby "outing" previous generations' Blackness and the fact that they are merely "passing" for white. This anxiety about race's future visibility depends on notions of racial essentialism—that passing people are "really" Black, by virtue of their Black "blood" or other essentially "Black" genetic material. It also recognizes that visual cues of race do not always follow clear lines of descent. This failure of race to follow clearly detectable lines in mixed-race people is representative of race's different possible constructions against its essentialist, biological definitions.

For the majority of nineteenth-century texts, interracial sexual desire is always framed as heterosexual desire, oriented toward biological reproductive futurity. It is therefore implicated in reproducing race; the anxieties that surround "interracial" desire are not only about racial integration, but racial mixture in "amalgamated" bodies. This overdetermined positioning of desire must be taken into account when examining white racist discourses against "amalgamation" and the limits of "pro-amalgamation" literatures if we are to fully understand the potential (or maybe the necessary) consequences of this desire: the reproduction of race. Race's relativity is tied to racial futurity, and race's relative futurity follows, in part, from the genealogical link between interracial sex and mixed-race people. Mixed-race people's identification with their racially oppressed kin is one example of the paradoxes of racial logic. In discourses of racial ambiguity, we can more clearly see the simultaneously operating modes of racialization—as paradoxical, atemporal, and representing queerly circular patterns.

My last two sections therefore deal not only with interracial kinship but with racially mixed figures of various kinds in order to illustrate the generational relations of race's queer temporalities. Race's relationship to embodiment—that is, race's visibility, detectability, and its corresponding supposed materiality and biology—is challenged when bodies are racially ambiguous. Nineteenth-century American literature abounds with instances in which the visual markers of race do not align with genealogies of hypodescent or racial identification or both. Departing from white woman figures, I discuss texts in which characters' connections to white womanhood are slippery or tenuous, denied by laws of racial hypodescent, and at times outright rejected by or denied to white(ish) women themselves.

Racial construction cannot be understood without turning to notions of racially reproductive futurity. Inasmuch as the figure of the child is, as Edelman puts it, “the emblem of the future’s unquestioned value,” the child—and particularly the racially mixed child—looms large in my project as the projected container of interracial desire and racial content.<sup>45</sup> When children are figured as decidedly not white, however, their signification varies significantly from the iconic child of Edelman’s imaginings. Childhood studies scholars such as Julian Gill-Peterson, Rebekah Sheldon, and Kathryn Bond Stockton have critiqued framings of childhood’s idealized projection into the future.<sup>46</sup> Black and brown childhood, in particular, has not been universally protected and sentimentalized, but perpetually threatened and even denied. Supposed childhood innocence and purity must therefore be reimagined if we are to seriously consider nonwhite children.<sup>47</sup> It becomes clear, then, that this discussion of racial reproduction and futurity cannot escape the specter of antiblackness. Throughout US history, the racial theory of hypodescent has focused on what Nyong’o calls “the biopolitical question of who counts as black in America.”<sup>48</sup> My final section therefore explores the scalar implications of the interracial family for a racialized national “family,” as interracial kinship queerly (and quite literally) reproduces the American nation.

Continuing the trajectory of queer racialization within bodies and families to nations, my final section extends my second section’s discussions of interracial family to even more expansive notions of race’s possible futures. This discussion takes up but also complicates readings of the domestic space of the home as a microcosm for the domestic space of the nation. Here I attend to ever-increasing scales for racialization (in racialized bodies to racialized domestic spaces to the racialized nation) as inherently intertwined. While Katherine McKittrick explains that “Black matters are spatial matters,” I hold that this is true of racial matters more generally.<sup>49</sup> If we understand that “geography is always human and the human is always geographic,” we might also acknowledge how space and race are socially produced in relation to one another.<sup>50</sup>

These last chapters move from a reading of Mary Jemison’s racialization in a moment of national racial beginnings to fictional narratives of national-racial postwar shifts. This section therefore maps the scalar and temporal shift from readings of individual (re)racialization to those of national racial (re)construction. The most profound anxieties about amalgamation lie in larger implications for the racially construed nation. Here we see the nation both as a continued teleology of race’s genealogical futures and as an expansionist space in which race is continually produced and reproduced. I intro-

duce this discussion at the end of my project in order to avoid too heavily foregrounding essentialist arguments about race that such discussions of racial mixture and production cannot seem to avoid. Nevertheless, I mean here to acknowledge the spatiotemporal connections between race's social construction between individuals and within domestic spaces of various scales. In this comparison, we can see how race's queer genealogies shift from bodies to families to nations, transferred genealogically and generationally through both space and time, even while resisting racial essentialism.

I end my discussion with a turn to the alternative—and more common—phenomenon of white womanhood's steeling itself against the kinds of queer (re)racialization I have discussed throughout this project. The history of white feminism in the US has been marked by its continued refusal to build models of interracial sisterhood. This political failing runs in tandem with the rhetorical preservation of white womanhood against threats of re-racialization and participation in different kinds of queer racial (re)production. Reading the conclusion of Morrison's *A Mercy* in light of twenty-first century white feminist rejections of interracial political sisterhood, I show how the theory of race I present here has continued resonance for our current landscape.

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## NOTES

### Introduction

- 1 Kate Chopin, “Désirée’s Baby” [1893], in *Bayou Folk* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1895), 154.
- 2 Interestingly, the assumption Armand makes is not that Désirée has been unfaithful. A short story of similarly reappearing racial genealogies is Pauline Hopkins’s “Talma Gordon,” which includes accusations of sexual unfaithfulness. As Captain Gordon says, “I hurried away to your mother and accused her of infidelity to her marriage vows,” which he does without first considering the possibility that a woman he had believed to be white had racially mixed ancestry. See Pauline Hopkins, “Talma Gordon” [1900], in *The American 1890s*, edited by Susan Harris Smith and Melanie Dawson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 115.
- 3 Alys Eve Weinbaum, *Wayward Reproductions: Genealogies of Race and Nation in Transatlantic Modern Thought* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 16, original emphasis.
- 4 As Anna Shannon Elfenbein holds, “Désirée’s Baby” is, in Chopin’s oeuvre, “the story most clearly patterned on the tragic octoroon formula.” See *Women on the Color Line: Evolving Stereotypes and the Writings of George Washington Cable, Grace King, Kate Chopin* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 118.
- 5 Alisha Gaines, *Black for a Day: White Fantasies of Race and Empathy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 8.
- 6 See, for example, Kimberly TallBear, “Narratives of Race and Indigeneity in the Genographic Project,” *Journal of Law, Medicine and Ethics* 35, no. 3 (2007): 412–24; J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); and Jean M. O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
- 7 Jodi A. Byrd, *Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xxiii.

- 8 Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), xxii.
- 9 Holly Jackson, *American Blood: The Ends of Family in American Literature, 1850–1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7.
- 10 See Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 74, and Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 85.
- 11 Alexis Pauline Gumbs, “Nobody Mean More: Black Feminist Pedagogy and Solidarity,” in *Imperial University: Academic Repression and Scholarly Dissent*, edited by Piya Chatterjee and Sunaina Maira (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 255, original emphasis.
- 12 Darieck Scott, *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 8, original emphasis.
- 13 Colin Dayan, *The Law Is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 118.
- 14 John Ernest, *Chaotic Justice: Rethinking African American Literary History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 36.
- 15 Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 60.
- 16 Ernest, *Chaotic Justice*, 41.
- 17 Later in this introduction and in my conclusion, I address the antiblackness that attends such understandings of mixed-race Black people as “mixed-race” rather than Black. This problem is separate from, though not unrelated to, questions of colorism.
- 18 Critical Mixed Race Studies has recently taken up an important critique of white-centered racial mixture. See, for example, Greg Carter’s discussion of this problem in *The United States of the United Races: A Utopian History of Racial Mixing* (New York: New York University Press, 2013). Work on interracial relations external from white people have also been the topic of much important work in nineteenth-century studies, including Julia H. Lee, *Interracial Encounters: Reciprocal Representations in African and Asian American Literatures, 1896–1937* (New York: New York University Press, 2011) and Hsuan L. Hsu, *Sitting in Darkness: Mark Twain, Asia, and Comparative Racialization* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).
- 19 Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* [1785], edited by David Waldstreicher (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s Press, 2002), 176. Samuel Morton, *Crania Americana; or, A Comparative View of the Skulls of Various Aboriginal Nations of North and South America, to Which Is Prefixed an Essay on the Varieties of the Human Species* (Philadelphia: J. Dobson, 1839) and *Crania Aegyptiaca; or, Observations on Egyptian Ethnography, Derived from Anatomy, History, and the Monuments* (Philadelphia: J. Penington, 1844).
- 20 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “biologism” (accessed January 23, 2020, <https://www.lexico.com/definition/biologism>).

- 21 Cheyfitz uses the term “bio-logic” in opposition to a cultural logic of identification and identity formation, which he shows is a more appropriate paradigm by which to understand American Indian identity. See Eric Cheyfitz, “The (Post) Colonial Construction of Indian Country,” in *The Columbia Guide to American Indian Literatures of the United States since 1945*, edited by Eric Cheyfitz (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 16. William Stanton discusses the development of biological understandings of race throughout the nineteenth century more generally in *The Leopard’s Spots* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).
- 22 Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 103.
- 23 Kimberly TallBear, *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 31.
- 24 Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 176.
- 25 Katy L. Chiles, *Transformable Race: Surprising Metamorphoses in the Literature of Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2.
- 26 Mark Rifkin, *The Erotics of Sovereignty: Queer Native Writing in the Era of Self-Determination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 4.
- 27 Christina Sharpe, “Lose Your Kin,” *New Inquiry*, November 16, 2016 (<https://thenewinquiry.com/essays/lose-your-kin/>).
- 28 Julius Augustus Lemcke describes this in *Reminiscences of an Indianian* (Indianapolis: Hollenbeck Press, 1905), 196. Several contemporary writers on Civil War-era politics also mention this demonstration as significant. See James A. Rawley, *Race and Politics: “Bleeding Kansas” and the Coming of the Civil War* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1969), 167; James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era, 1848–1865* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 159; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 32; and Stephen H. Hartnett, *Democratic Dissent and the Cultural Fictions of Antebellum America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 69. Throughout this book I have chosen not to represent the word “nigger” in my textual citations, but will represent this word as “n[—]” as I have here. I recognize the historical violence attached to this term and the importance of not eliding that violence in discussions of racism. However, I am tired of reading this word and I no longer see the illustrative value in repeating it, even in quotation, in my own work. I believe the force of racist violence is conveyed sufficiently in the quotations in which this term appears even without the word’s direct quotation. My choice to represent this term as “n[—]” is meant to convey both the word’s presence in these texts and my deliberate refusal of direct quotation. My methodology here follows the pedagogical principals that Koritha Mitchell discusses in her practice of not reading this word aloud that in her classrooms. See “Teaching & the N-word: Questions to Consider,” on Koritha Mitchell’s official website, accessed April 16, 2020, <http://www.korithamitchell.com/teaching-and-the-n-word/> and Koritha Mitchell, “The N-Word in the Classroom: Just Say NO,” March 4, 2019, in *C19 Podcast*, produced by Xine Yao, Paul Kotheimer, and Koritha Mitchell, podcast,



- MP3 audio, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/s2e6-the-n-word-in-the-classroom-just-say-no/id1275235064?i=1000431046556>.
- 29 Elise Lemire, *Miscegenation: Making Race in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 4. While Lemire uses the phrase “sexual race preference” here, I choose the word “desire” rather than “preference” to highlight these sexual-racial orientations. The word “preference” suggests a prioritization, indicating that sexual desire is directed preferentially at persons of one specific race rather than another. While it may be true that some people or characters do sexually “prefer” mates of a particular race (whether for political, fetishistic, practical, racist, or other reasons), this is not always the case. My reference to “sexual desire” is meant to leave open various possibilities for the sexual impulses of the figures I discuss. Whether these impulses constitute hierarchical, sexual, racial “preferences” (as was assumed about figures such as Desdemona and Mary King) is a matter tangential to my discussion. The possibility that their sexual desire is directed at nonwhite men in these narratives is the possibility with which I am most concerned.
- 30 Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), 246.
- 31 For a discussion of how African Americans deftly pushed against the various kinds of racist scientific discourse that would both exclude them and brand them as inferior, see Britt Rusert, *Fugitive Science: Empiricism and Freedom in Early African American Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2017).
- 32 Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 9.
- 33 Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 13.
- 34 P. Gabrielle Foreman, “Who’s Your Mama? ‘White’ Mulatta Genealogies, Early Photography, and Anti-Passing Narratives of Slavery and Freedom,” *American Literary History* 14, no. 3 (2002): 506.
- 35 On the latter point, see Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women*.
- 36 Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*, 20.
- 37 Tavia Nyong’o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 6.
- 38 Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 5.
- 39 Barbara Christian, “The Race for Theory,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 1 (Spring, 1988): 68. Derrick Spire notes, similarly, how literary forms “such as the sketches, short fiction, and poetry published in black and antislavery periodicals and newspapers, did . . . important theoretical work.” See Derrick Spire, *The Practices of Citizenship: Black Politics and Print Culture in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 10.
- 40 Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 55.

- 41 Mark Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight? Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 34.
- 42 Lydia Maria Child, *An Appeal in Favor of Americans Called Africans* [1833] (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 200.
- 43 These photographs are from the William and Ellen Smith Craft Photo Album, in the Craft and Crum Families, 1780–2007 Collection, held by the Avery Research Center at the College of Charleston. The entire album is digitized here: <https://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:39896>.
- 44 My discussion of “kinfullness” has been developed separately from, though it is not entirely unrelated to, what Ruha Benjamin calls “kinfulness.” See Ruha Benjamin, “Black AfterLives Matter: Cultivating Kinfulness as Reproductive Justice,” in *Making Kin, Not Population*, edited by Adele Clarke and Donna Haraway (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2018). My spelling—with a double “l”—means to recall Hortense Spillers’ notion of kinlessness and specifically to replace this with an alternative (though not incompatible) theorization of kinship’s fullness. I discuss my concept of kinfullness more extensively in chapter 4.
- 45 Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 4.
- 46 See Julian, Gill-Peterson, Rebekah Sheldon, Kathryn Bond Stockton. “What Is the Now, Even of Then?” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 22.4 (2016): 495.
- 47 On race and childhood innocence, see Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).
- 48 Nyong’o, *Amalgamation Waltz*, 4.
- 49 Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xii.
- 50 McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, ix, xi.

Chapter One. Blackface Desdemona, or, the White Woman “Begrimed”

Portions of this material were previously published in “Blackface Desdemona: Theorizing Race on the Nineteenth-Century American Stage,” *Theatre Annual* 70 (2017), 39–59.

- 1 Anna Cora Ogden Mowatt Ritchie, *Mimic Life; or, Before and behind the Curtain. A Series of Narratives* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1856), 103.
- 2 Ritchie, *Mimic Life*, 103.
- 3 Ritchie, *Mimic Life*, 104. In his discussion of this scene, Jeffrey H. Richards describes the corporality of this exchange of color as a reminder of the body that shatters the illusion of the embodied figures onstage. See Jeffrey H. Richards, “Chastity and the Stage in Mowatt’s ‘Stella,’” *Studies in American Fiction* 24, no. 1 (1996): 87–100.
- 4 Ritchie, *Mimic Life*, 104.
- 5 Even as I acknowledge the use of blackface makeup’s failures to represent Black people in this chapter, the use of this medium metaphorized the racialization