AHR Forum

Amalgamation and Hypodescent: The Question of Ethnoracial Mixture in the History of the United States

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IN THE MIDDLE OF A JULY NIGHT IN 1958, a couple living in a small town in Virginia were awakened when a party of local police officers walked into their bedroom and arrested them for a felony violation of Virginia's miscegenation statute. The couple had been married in the District of Columbia, which did allow blacks and whites to marry each other, but the two Virginians were subsequently found guilty of violating the statute's prohibition on marrying out of state with the intent of circumventing Virginia law.[1]

That same summer, Hannah Arendt, the distinguished political theorist, an émigré from Hitler's Germany then living in New York City, was writing an essay on school integration. That issue had been brought to flashpoint the previous year in Little Rock, Arkansas, by President Eisenhower's use of federal troops to enforce the ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court that public schools were no longer to be racially segregated. But Arendt used her essay on school integration, which had been commissioned by the editors of *Commentary*, to talk also about miscegenation laws. Arendt seems not to have known of what was happening in Virginia that summer to Richard and Mildred Loving, the couple whose last name was such a fitting emblem for a relationship that was being denied the sanction of law. But Arendt insisted that, whatever the injustice entailed by the segregation of public schools, a deeper injustice by far was any restriction on an individual's choice of a spouse. The laws that make "mixed marriage a criminal offense," Arendt declared, were "the most outrageous" of the racist regulations then in effect in the American South.[2]

The stunned editors of *Commentary* balked. An aghast Sidney Hook, to whom

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[1] Peggy Pascoe, "Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of 'Race' in Twentieth-Century America," *Journal of American History* 83 (June 1996): 64–65; Robert A. Pratt, "Crossing the Color Line: A Historical Assessment and Personal Narrative of *Loving v. Virginia*," *Howard Law Journal* 41 (1998), as rpt. in Kevin R. Johnson, ed., *Mixed Race America and the Law* (New York, 2003), 56–59.

[2] Hannah Arendt, "Reflections on Little Rock," *Dissent* (Winter 1959): 79. This incident is analyzed by Werner Sollors, "Of Mules and Mares in a Land of Difference; or, Quadrupeds All?" *American Quarterly* 42 (June 1990), esp. 173–77.

the editors showed a copy, rushed into print in another magazine to complain that Arendt was making "equality in the bedroom" seem more important than "equality in education."[3] Arendt's essay daring to suggest that the civil rights movement had gotten its priorities wrong later appeared in yet another magazine, the more radical *Dissent*, but only as prefaced by a strong editorial disclaimer and then followed by two rebuttals, one of which actually defended legal restrictions on interracial marriage. A well-meaning European refugee, said by friends to be hopelessly naïve about the United States, had raised publicly the very last topic that advocates of civil rights for black Americans wanted to discuss in the 1950s: the question of ethnoracial mixture.

To what extent are the borders between communities of descent to be maintained and why? The question is an old one of species-wide relevance, more demanding of critical study than ever at the start of the twenty-first century as more nations are diversified by migration, and as the inhibitions of the 1950s recede farther into the past. The history of this question in the United States invites special scrutiny because this country is one of the most conspicuously multi-descent nations in the industrialized North Atlantic West. The United States has served as a major site for engagement with the question, both behaviorally and discursively. Americans have mixed in certain ways and not others, and they have talked about it in certain ways and not others.

From 1958, I will look both backward and forward, drawing on recent scholarship to observe what the history of the United States looks like when viewed through the lens of our question. Certain truths come into sharper focus when viewed through this lens, and whatever instruction the case of the United States may afford to a world facing the prospect of increased mixture comes more fully into view.

Why were Arendt's contemporaries so eager to avoid the question of ethnoracial mixture? Because they had good reason to expect that any discussion of it would play into the hands of segregationists. Defenders of the Jim Crow system had been saying for years that the whole issue was race-mixing, anyway. All that civil rights agitation, they said, was an elaborate smoke screen for the simple truth, which was that black men wanted white women. School integration in particular was said to be a slippery slope if not a conspiracy: the mixing of black and white in the classroom would lead to more social contact, and ultimately to miscegenation.

Such charges on the part of segregationists would have been of less concern to the liberals were not so many other Americans, including an imposing number of white, northern opponents of segregation, dubious about marriage across the color line. A Gallup poll of that very year showed that 96 percent of white Americans disapproved of interracial marriage. This sentiment did not necessarily entail support for the remaining laws against black-white marriage still being enforced in Virginia and several other southern states, but it did mean that organizing to overturn such laws was not a priority.

Only nine years after the Arendt episode, to be sure, the Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Loving v. Virginia* that the Virginia statute was unconstitutional.

[3] Sidney Hook, *New Leader*, April 13, 1959.

Things moved quickly in the 1960s.[4] When Mildred and Richard Loving learned that a major civil rights bill was being debated in Congress, they were inspired to appeal their conviction. But black-white marriages were still against the law in every state but one south of the Mason-Dixon line as late as 1967, when the court's ruling in *Loving* ended legal restrictions on marriage across any and all color lines.[5] Thereafter, white opposition to black-white marriages diminished gradually but steadily, decade by decade.[6] Black-white marriages themselves remained rare, although they tripled in the quarter-century after the court's ruling.[7]

Yet Arendt understood more fully than did her exasperated friends that the Virginia statute's approach to the question of ethnoracial mixture was peculiarly American. Even the Union of South Africa did not have a miscegenation statute until 1949, and that one was based on the American model.[8] The notorious Nuremberg laws of Nazi Germany were, as Werner Sollors has pointed out, inspired partly by the miscegenation laws of the United States.[9] The cosmopolitan Arendt knew that racial restrictions on marriage were a real problem from a human rights point of view, and were a striking historical anomaly that American liberals were loath to face. The very word "miscegenation" was, after all, an American contribution to the English language.

Prior to the coining of this term during the Civil War, "amalgamation" had been the word generally used to refer to the mixing of races. This was true of Wendell Phillips and a handful of other abolitionists who did espouse the eventual mixing of the races as a goal,[10] and was true for alarmists warning against it. But in 1863, the very year emancipation made mixture more possible, "amalgamation" was replaced by the more ominous word that rang more like "mistaken mixture," and under circumstances not so different from those that surrounded Arendt nearly a century later. In an episode familiar to specialists in U.S. history but known to few other people today, *Miscegenation* was the title of an anonymous tract widely distributed

[4] An important example of open opposition to miscegenation laws during the 1960s was William D. Zabel, "Interracial Marriage and the Law," *Atlantic* (October 1965): 75–79.

[5] *Loving v. Commonwealth of Virginia*, 388 U.S. 1; 87 S.Ct. 1817; 1967 U.S. Maryland repealed its miscegenation statute just prior to the court's action. Fourteen states in the Far West and upper Middle West repealed their statutes between 1952 and 1966.

[6] Polling data are reviewed in one of the most carefully detailed monographs yet addressed to the history of ethnoracial mixture in the United States, Paul Spickard, *Mixed Blood: Intermarriage and Ethnic Identity in Twentieth-Century America* (Madison, Wis., 1989), esp. 192–93.

[7] Martin Kilmjin, "Trends in Black/White Intermarriage," *Social Forces* 72 (1993): 119–46.

[8] A. Leon Higgenbotham and Barbara K. Kopytoff, "Racial Purity and Interracial Sex in the Law of Colonial and Antebellum Virginia," in Werner Sollors, ed., *Interracialism: Black-White Intermarriage in American History, Literature, and Law* (New York, 2000), 138–39. Higgenbotham and Kopytoff quote the South African minister of the interior's presentation to the assembly of that country in 1949, in which the minister urges opponents of the proposed legislation to consider the fact that "thirty out of the forty-eight states of the United States" have "found it necessary to take legislative steps" of exactly the sort he proposed for South Africa.

[9] Sollors, "Introduction," *Interracialism*, 6. Sollors cites Heinrich Krieger, *Das Rassenrecht in den Vereiningten Staaten* (Berlin, 1936).

[10] Phillips's most famous utterance on this theme was his address on the Fourth of July, 1863, in Framingham, Massachusetts, in which he endorsed, and called by the name of "amalgamation," that "sublime mingling of the races, which is God's own method of civilizing and elevating the world." The history of the pre–Civil War discourse about amalgamation has recently been clarified by Leslie M. Harris, "From Abolitionist Amalgamators to 'Rulers of the Five Points': The Discourse of Interracial Sex and Reform in Antebellum New York City," in Martha Hodes, ed., *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History* (New York, 1999), 191–212.

in the North late in 1863 calling on the Republican Party to embrace the cause of race-mixing and make it the basis for that party's campaign of the following year. The tract was a hoax, written and distributed by two proslavery journalists who hoped to push the Republicans into endorsing this manifestly unpopular idea and thus to be more likely to lose the election to the Democrats. As Sidney Kaplan has demonstrated, the abolitionists themselves were suspicious from the start.[11] The abolitionists did not know the tract was a hoax until after the election, when Abraham Lincoln's success rendered the revelation of the hoax a minor footnote to the campaign. But all during the campaign, the Republicans apparently felt about the anonymous author much the same way liberals of 1958 felt about Arendt.

Eventually, miscegenation would become an ostensibly neutral word,[12] but one that flourished in a Jim Crow discourse alongside another term that came into use for the mixing of white Americans with each other. This was the notion of the "melting pot." It had been around since the earliest years of the Republic, but it gained currency at the start of the twentieth century in relation to massive immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe. This problematic figure of speech was used primarily to address the prospects for the incorporation of these predominantly Italian, Jewish, and Polish immigrants and their descendants, and not simply as ethnic groups within a plural society but as individuals who would as a matter of course intermarry with the British and other Northwestern European stocks. What made the term problematic was an ambiguity analyzed by Philip Gleason and others. Was the idea to melt down the immigrants and to then pour the resulting, formless liquid into preexisting cultural and social molds modeled on Anglo-Protestants like Henry Ford and Woodrow Wilson, or was the idea instead that everyone, Mayflower descendants and Sicilians and Irish and Ashkenazi and Slovaks, would act chemically upon each other so that all would be changed, and a new compound would emerge?[13]

Although both versions of the melting pot had their champions and their critics—and of course there were strong voices against both, preferring to keep out altogether any immigrants who were not "Nordic"—very few of the early twentieth-century discussants of the melting pot even mentioned blacks, for whom mixing with whites was "miscegenation."[14] Yet when Ralph Waldo Emerson had spoken before

[11] Sidney Kaplan, "The Miscegenation Issue in the Election of 1864," in Kaplan, *American Studies in Black and White: Selected Essays, 1949–1989* (Amherst, Mass., 1991), 47–100. Kaplan's classic analysis of the "miscegenation hoax" was first published in 1949. For a recent, authoritative study of the hoax and of the entire discourse about "amalgamation" and "miscegenation" during the antebellum and Civil War eras, see Elise Lemire, *"Miscegenation": Making Race in America* (Philadelphia, 2002), esp. 115–44. Lemire argues that the literary depiction of black-white intimacy helped create the very categories of black and white as these categories had come to be popularly understood in the United States by the time of the Civil War.

[12] Even W. E. B. Du Bois used "miscegenation" interchangeably with "amalgamation" and "racial mixing." His learned essay of 1935, "Miscegenation," intended for an encyclopedia but not published during his lifetime, is available in Sollors, *Interracialism*, 461–73.

[13] Philip Gleason, "The Melting Pot: Symbol of Fusion or Confusion?" *American Quarterly* 16 (Spring 1964): 20–46. Invocations of the figure of the melting pot in our own time have largely forgotten the element of anti-Anglo aggression entailed in some of its early formulations. In the climactic scene of Israel Zangwill's play of 1909, *The Melting-Pot*, a major agent in the popularization of the concept, the Jewish immigrant hero envisages a future in which Mayflower descendants will be transformed in the fiery crucible and made equal to more recent immigrants from many lands.

[14] Among the few who did this was Zangwill himself, in a fleeting reference at the very end of his

the Civil War about an American "smelting pot"—a slightly different figure of speech associated originally with the concept of amalgamation—he had explicitly included "Africans and Polynesians" in addition to "all the European tribes."[15] Not that Emerson's welcoming of people of all colors and from all continents was shared by that many of his white contemporaries. Quite the contrary. Emerson here spoke for a tiny minority. But he spoke in the idiom of melting, or smelting, before the vocabulary had changed. As the new word—miscegenation—became associated with black-white mixing, a preoccupation of the years after the Civil War, the residual European immigrant aspect of the question came to be more than ever a thing apart, discussed all the more easily without any reference to the African-American aspect of the question. This separation of mixture talk into two discourses facilitated, and was in turn reinforced by, the process Matthew Frye Jacobson has detailed whereby European immigrant groups became less ambiguously white by becoming more and more definitively "not black."[16] The Jim Crow era featured not only separate schools and public accommodations in many states but also separate and invidious national vocabularies for talking about mixture.

The two vocabularies reflected the two historical conditions that make the United States the North Atlantic West's most dynamic site for dealing with our question. First, the United States operated under one of the few constitutional regimes in that domain that had tolerated slavery as recently as the 1860s and as a result had a national population a significant segment of which—about 12 percent during most of the twentieth century—was color-marked as once having been pieces of property or as being the direct descendants of people who had been.[17] Second, the United States was the most self-consciously immigrant-based society in all of Europe and North America, distinguished even from Canada by the proportion of its population derived from outside Great Britain and France and by the fact that Canada did not have a citizenship law to distinguish its own nationality from that of the British Empire until 1947. The foreign-born population of the United States between 1860 and 1930 ranged between 11.6 percent and 14.7 percent, and a much larger percentage than that of white inhabitants throughout those seventy years were, of course, the children or grandchildren of immigrants.

A third condition helps make the United States a setting in which our question is importantly engaged: the presence of Indians, or at least the presence of those indigenous people who were left after the slaughters and disease-caused deaths that accompanied the occupation of their land by Europeans. Yet the Indian case was sufficiently different from both the African-American case and that of the European immigrants to stand somewhat outside the miscegenation conversation and the melting pot conversation. Indians had been enslaved episodically in the British colonies of North America, but Indian slavery was never a significant feature

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play in one of his lists of the peoples that "the great Alchemist" would eventually make into one: "Celt and Latin, Slav and Teuton, Greek and Syrian—black and yellow"; Israel Zangwill, *The Melting-Pot* (New York, 1909), 199.

[15] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960–82), 11: 299–300.

[16] Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998).

[17] Slavery continued in Cuba until 1884 and in Brazil until 1888.

of labor systems in the United States. Twelve states did include Indians in their miscegenation statutes, but enforcement was often lax. The Virginia law did not include Indians because a motion to include them was defeated by Tidewater aristocrats who claimed to be the descendants of John Rolfe and Pocahontas. For all the anti-Indian behavior and attitudes on the part of the white population, the latter often nourished an idealized view of the "noble savage," which historians have shown coexisted with the most genocidal of dispositions. Millions of white Americans have bragged that they had "Indian blood," and often cited it by quantum, as in "I'm one-eighth Cherokee." The appropriation of Indian land was accompanied by an extensive appropriation of the Indian genetic heritage and Indian symbolic identification with America. The topic of white-Indian mixture was most often discussed in terms of blood quantum, not only by federal officials but also by tribal governments and in everyday conversation on the part of whites.[18]

The affirmation of Indian ancestry proceeds apace in our own time. In the twenty years between 1970 and 1990, the federal census reported an increase of 259 percent in the American Indian population despite a very low birthrate. What had happened, of course, is that more and more Americans decided to "come out" as part Indian.[19] The American Indian population, even as expanded, remains a tiny fraction of the nation—about 1 percent—but it demands mention on account of the contrast it presents to the African-American case. We do not see a multitude of ostensibly white Americans reclassifying themselves as part black.[20]

The stigma carried by blackness is unique, and is affixed and perpetuated resolutely by the American practice of treating blackness as a monolithic identity that an individual either has or does not have on the basis of the principle that any African ancestry at all determines that one is simply black.[21] The invidiousness of this "one-drop rule" was eloquently encapsulated by Barbara Fields more than twenty years ago: we have a convention "that considers a white woman capable of giving birth to a black child but denies that a black woman can give birth to a white child."[22] One has not been able to say, "I'm one-eighth African American" without giving up socially, if not legally, the seven-eighths part of one's self that is not. You can be one-eighth Cherokee and still be seven-eighths something else, but if you are one-eighth black you are not likely to be counted as white at all. Indeed, one index of the power of the one-drop rule for blacks is that some Indian tribal governments

[18] For an accessible, pointed discussion of the ambiguities of "Indianness," including an account of the popular practice of claiming a fractional Indian ancestry, almost always through one's grandmother, see P. S. Deloria and Robert Laurence, "What's an Indian?" *Arkansas Law Review* 44 (1991), rpt. in Johnson, *Mixed Race*, 312–18.

[19] See the tables of the federal census as conveniently available in Norman R. Yetman, *Majority and Minority: The Dynamics of Race and Ethnicity in American Life*, 6th edn. (Boston, 1999), 88.

[20] Such cases of attempted white-to-black reclassification, while rare, are not unknown. They are often discussed in relation to minority-eligible entitlement programs. This phenomenon is addressed in Luther Wright, Jr., "Who's Black, Who's White, and Who Cares," *Vanderbilt Law Review* 48 (1995), rpt. in Johnson, *Mixed Race*, 181–83.

[21] The standard history of the principle of hypodescent in the United States is F. James Davis, *Who Is Black?* (University Park, Pa., 1991). A readable popular account that increased public awareness is Lawrence Wright, "One Drop of Blood," *New Yorker* (July 25, 1994): 46–55.

[22] Barbara Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in Morgan Kousser, *et al.*, *Region, Race, and Reconstruction* (New York, 1982), 149.

have recently tried to expel from tribal membership long-time members who have demonstrably black ancestors.[23]

Comparativists have often commented on the uniqueness to the United States of this principle of hypodescent.[24] The principle is widely taken for granted in the United States right down to the present, and is even defended as a political strategy in some contexts by organizations speaking for the interests of African Americans.[25] But the principle originates in the property interests of slaveholders. Children begotten upon slave women by their owners or by other white men would grow up as slaves, adding to the property of the owners of the women and preserving the amazingly durable fiction that male slaveholders and the other white males in the vicinity were faithful to their wives. The principle was sharpened during the Jim Crow era, when opposition to social equality for blacks was of course well served by a monolithic notion of blackness accompanied by legislation that outlawed as miscegenation black-white marriages but left less strictly regulated any non-marital sex in which white males might engage with black females. As Tocqueville famously remarked well before the Civil War, "To debauch a Negro girl hardly injures an American's reputation; to marry her dishonors him."[26]

Some of the slave era and Jim Crow regimes did employ fractional classifications, providing that "Octoroons," "Quadroons," and "Mulattos" be separately counted and allowed distinctive rights and privileges in some jurisdictions.[27] But this fractional approach was hard to administer, invited litigation, and blurred lines that many whites wanted kept sharp. In 1894, Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* mocked a law that stipulated 1/32 as the fraction of black ancestry that decided one's race.[28] "Mulatto" was dropped from the federal census after 1920, and more and more state governments went the way of the Virginia statute, which as revised in 1924 classified as white only a person "who has no trace whatsoever of blood other than Caucasian."[29]

[23] For the case of the Seminoles, see "Who Is a Seminole, and Who Gets to Decide?" *New York Times* (January 29, 2001): 1.

[24] A recent example is the summary discussion by David Parker and Miri Song in the introduction to their edited collection, *Rethinking "Mixed Race"* (London, 2001), 13–14. A cogent account of the different histories of ethnoracial categorization and related public policies in Brazil, South Africa, and the United States is G. Reginald Daniel, "Multiracial Identity in Global Perspective: The United States, Brazil, and South Africa," in Loretta I. Winters and Herman L. DeBose, eds., *New Faces in a Changing America: Multiracial Identity in the 21st Century* (Thousand Oaks, Calif., 2003), 247–86.

[25] See the comments on this issue by Christine B. Hickman, "The Devil and the 'One Drop' Rule," *Michigan Law Review* 95 (1997), rpt. in Johnson, *Mixed Race*, 104–10.

[26] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop, trans. and ed. (Chicago, 2000), 590.

[27] For a detailed account of the legal history of hypodescent prior to its sharpening in the early twentieth century, see Michael A. Elliott, "Telling the Difference: Nineteenth-Century Legal Narratives of Racial Taxonomy," *Law and Social Inquiry* 24 (1999): 611–36. For a similarly detailed account of the history of the U.S. Census's engagement with mixture from 1790 to the present, see Ann Morning, "New Faces, Old Faces: Counting the Multiracial Population Past and Present," in Winters and DeBose, *New Faces*, 41–67.

[28] Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (Hartford, Conn., 1894).

[29] The text of the Virginia "Act to Preserve Racial Integrity" is available in Sollors, *Interracialism*, 23–24. Hypodescent, it should be acknowledged, was not universally applied in all states even after 1924. Louisiana law, for example, was always more responsive to degrees of African descent than the laws of most other states. The inconsistencies of efforts to impose fractional definitions in the laws of various states is a major theme of Teresa Zackondik, "Fixing the Color Line: The Mulatto, Southern Courts, and Racial Identity," *American Quarterly* 53 (September 2001): 420–51.

Criticism of this one-drop rule has surfaced from time to time,[30] but not until the 1990s did critical discussion of hypodescent become sustained and widespread in mainstream media. The lead in this discussion was taken by persons at least some of whose white ancestry derives from recent voluntary unions rather than from the legacy of the exploitation of slave women by white masters and overseers.[31] But at stake is the degree of identity choice available to all black individuals whose measure of whiteness has been erased by law and convention. At stake, too, is the extent to which the United States as a whole will finally acknowledge the reality of the black-white mixing that has already taken place, and will thus be obliged to accept a fact long recognized by scholars: that blackness in the United States is an ascribed status, imposed on a spectrum of color shades and descent percentages, rather than a category of nature.[32] At stake, further and most important, is the significance of blackness itself in this society. While there is a danger that the acceptance of mixture will ultimately reinforce white privilege by treating as "white" all but the darkest, who might then be all the more isolated and subject to enduring prejudice, isn't there also a more hopeful prospect? The more that mixture is accepted, the less fear there might be of what is being mixed. Blackness itself might become less stigmatized. If the one-drop rule is an indicator of the depth of anti-black racism, might not the weakening of that rule be an indicator of the diminution of that racism? The present historical moment differs from previous episodes of "whiting" in that now the very white-black distinction is being critically engaged rather than reinforced and sharpened in the process of being relocated to render Jews, Italians, Mexicans, and others more clearly white and blacks more clearly black.

The vigorous debate over the census classifications—should there be a box to check for mixed race, should an individual be able to check more than one box, and so forth—is only the most visible aspect of an unprecedented discursive episode in the history of American engagement with our question. A society that often has policed the black-white color line with terror now registers a more relaxed fascination with the crossing of that line, even widespread acceptance of such crossings. Hollywood movies explore the theme with increasing frequency, and family memoirs of black-white fusion fill the display tables at bookstores. Some of these books—including James McBride's *The Color of Water* and Shirlee Taylor Haizlip's *The Sweeter the Juice*—have become bestsellers.[33] And among recent

[30] The definitive work on the literary history of black-white mixing is Werner Sollors, *Neither Black nor White yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (New York, 1997).

[31] A discerning study of the sociology of the new "multiracial movement" is Kim Williams, "From Civil Rights to the Multiracial Movement," in Winters and DeBose, *New Faces*, 85–98.

[32] For an exceptionally clear and fair-minded analysis of the concept of "race" in the American historical context, see Lawrence Blum, *"I'm Not a Racist, But . . . "* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2002). For a helpful sampling of recent theoretical writings on this concept, see Bernard Boxill, ed., *Race and Racism* (Oxford, 2001), especially Boxill's introduction, 1–41, and the opening essay by Naomi Zack, "Race and Philosophic Meaning," 43–82. See also Naomi Zack, ed., *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity* (Lanham, Md., 1995).

[33] James McBride, *The Color of Water* (New York, 1999); Shirlee Taylor Haizlip, *The Sweeter the Juice* (New York, 1994); see also Paul Spickard, "The Subject Is Mixed Race: The Boom in Biracial Biography," in Parker and Song, *Rethinking "Mixed Race,"* 76–98. Spickard addresses more than three dozen biographies and memoirs published in the United States in the 1990s. He also engages critically (80–81) one of the most widely read essays of the 1990s on ethnoracial mixture and the one-drop rule,

fiction bestsellers, Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* gives us the most artistically and morally ambitious treatment of black-white mixing and of the multiple paradoxes of the one-drop rule offered by a white novelist since Mark Twain.[34] Organizations lobbying for greater recognition of ethnoracial mixture proliferate, sponsor conferences, publish volume after volume, and now operate numerous web sites.[35] DNA evidence lending support to the old suspicion that Thomas Jefferson fathered children with a slave mistress has stimulated sympathetic retellings of the Jefferson–Sally Hemings story that help mark the difference between our time and even the very recent past, when the mere mention of Hemings was often received as a scurrilous attack on Jefferson's honor. Tellers of the Jefferson-Hemings story now explore more readily the possibility that the relationship was a tender and loving one, and sometimes imply that the relationship, despite the horrors of slavery, illustrates the way in which American society is a single, extended family.[36] One journalist after another takes as a harbinger for the nation's demographic and ideological future the determination of the popular golf champion Tiger Woods to affirm all aspects of his multiple ancestry, including black, white, Indian, Chinese, and Thai.[37]

Oprah Winfrey proclaimed the mixed-descent Woods to be "America's son" in a construction that invites a comparison between what Woods' "family tree" might look like and the family tree of another "America's son," the one drawn by Norman Rockwell at about the time of Hannah Arendt's imbroglio with *Commentary* and the Lovings' arrest in Virginia. Rockwell's "Family Tree," offered as the *Saturday Evening Post* cover for October 24, 1959, is defined by a preoccupation with degrees of respectability and with Union-Confederate reconciliation, not by the mixing of

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Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "White Like Me," *New Yorker* (June 17, 1996): 66–81, an analysis of the life of "black" writer Anatole Broyard, who passed as white.

[34] Philip Roth, *The Human Stain* (New York, 2000). But while Twain allowed the "black" character growing up as white to display disturbing behaviors that played to his reader's suspicions that "black blood" might carry negative propensities, Roth embraced his "black" character in what was, for Roth, the ultimate psychological and cultural solidarity: Roth endowed Coleman Silk with the persona Roth had developed affectionately in novel after novel over the course of thirty-five years, the persona of the neurotic Jewish intellectual. Midway between Twain and Roth, chronologically, another prominent white novelist addressed the theme, but Sinclair Lewis's *Kingsblood Royal* (New York, 1947) offered white readers few of the concessions Twain did, was covered by none of the conventions of humor that gave Twain great license for dealing with sensitive topics, and was too deeply radical in its critique of racism and of the one-drop rule to generate a positive response from a white readership in the 1940s.

[35] The most prominent organizations include the Association of MultiEthnic Americans and Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally); http://www.webcom/intvoice is the web site for another such organization, "Interracial Voice." One scholar has counted more than eighty multi-racial organizations established in the United States since 1979; see Williams, "From Civil Rights to the Multiracial Movement," 93. Two volumes of the 1990s that advanced public awareness of this movement were edited by a president of the Association of MultiEthnic Americans: M. M. Root, ed., *Racially Mixed People in America* (Thousand Oaks, Calif., 1992); Root, ed., *The Multiracial Experience* (Newbury Park, Calif., 1996).

[36] For a thorough, scholarly review of the evidence, see Joseph J. Ellis, "Jefferson: Post-DNA," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 57 (2000): 125–38.

[37] Woods stimulated extensive public discussion of the one-drop rule in 1997 when he told talk-show host Oprah Winfrey on national television that he was not comfortable being labeled "black," and sometimes thought of himself as a "Cablinasian," a label made up of fragments of "Caucasian," "black," "Indian," and "Asian." For an informative discussion of the controversy surrounding Woods, see Henry Yu, "How Tiger Woods Lost His Stripes," in John Carlos Rowe, ed., *Post-Nationalist American Studies* (Berkeley, Calif., 2000), 223–46.

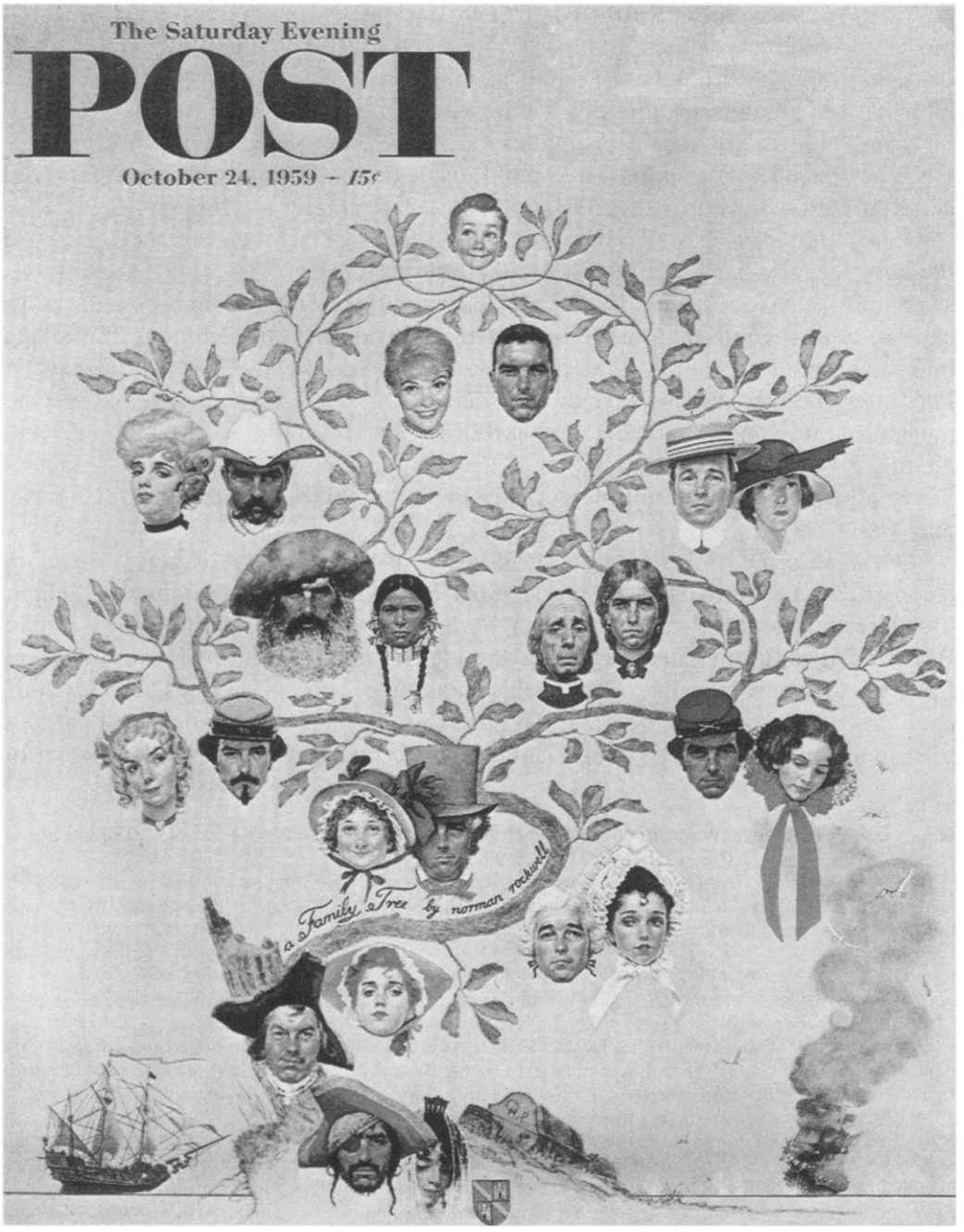

FIGURE 1: "Family Tree" by Norman Rockwell. Copyright 1959 SEPS: licensed by Curtis Publishing, Indianapolis, Indiana. All rights reserved. www.curtispublishing.com.

ethnoracial groups. (See Figure 1.) Rockwell shows the stylized, Ozzie-and-Harriet era white child to be the descendant of, among other characters, a colonial-era pirate and frontier-based "Squaw man" and their mates. There is no black face on the tree, but Rockwell invites beholders, while chuckling at their culture's tendency

for genealogical aggrandizement, to be comfortable with the Indian woman in the Anglo child's genealogy, as well as with the presence there of a proto-Latina in the person of the pirate's mate.[38] The whiteness of the cherubic little boy at the top of the painting filters visually down the tree—and back through American history—to cover all the people Rockwell admits into the company of begetters and begotten. The men whose social marginality is marked by their non-Anglo mates are thus recognized in the family tree of the white 1950s, as are even the slightly darker women who coupled with the one-eyed pirate and the scruffy frontiersman. Rockwell's "Family Tree" is a super-Anglo picture of the American population, in which tiny quantities of Hispanic and Indian descent are feminized, located in a distant past, and diluted to the point of non-recognition in Rockwell's white present. Had Rockwell been more concerned to display an ethnoracially marked melting pot, he might well have rendered some of the more swarthy figures in the picture easily recognized as non-Anglo European immigrants. But the evident lack of such an intent on Rockwell's part renders his inclusion of the Indian and the *senorita/senora* all the more revealingly incidental. It was inconceivable that Rockwell would have encouraged the white readers of the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1959 to suppose that a black person might be among their ancestors, but it was not a stretch to get Indians and Latinos into the mix.

But the ancestry of Tiger Woods also includes Chinese and Thai. Woods' partly Asian ancestry can direct us to one of the circumstances that have promoted the extraordinary new display of interest in the question of ethnoracial mixture in our own time and can turn us, also, to dimensions of the question involving Americans of Asian and Latin American descent.

MASSIVE IMMIGRATION FROM ASIA AND LATIN AMERICA since about 1970 has radically altered the ethnoracial composition of the United States, has produced new kinds of mixtures, and by enacting socially recognized mixture on a large scale has made some African Americans all the more cognizant of the invidious character of the one-drop rule for black identity.[39] We get a sense of the magnitude of this new migration if we contemplate the fact that the number of non-black immigrants between 1970 and 2000 who are also non-Europeans roughly equals the number of African Americans already resident in the United States in 1980, about 26 million. Another 9 million non-black immigrants entered the United States during the same three decades, especially from Russia, Ukraine, Poland, and Iran (a "Middle Eastern" rather than an "Asian" country by popular reckoning), but the Asian and Latin American migrations were the most relevant to our question. Each of these

[38] The convention of representing non-Anglo ancestry as disproportionately female is often noted in the literature on ethnoracial mixtures. See, for example, Bethany Ruth Berger, "After Pocahontas: Indian Women and the Law, 1830–1934," *American Indian Law Review* 1 (1997), rpt. in Johnson, *Mixed Race*, 71–80.

[39] For a memoir of a "black" person who questioned hypodescent only after encountering the *mestizaje* associated with Latinos, see Ranier Spencer, "Race and Mixed-Race: A Personal Tour," in William S. Penn, ed., *As We Are Now: Mixblood Essays on Race and Identity* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997), 126–39, esp. 134–35.

two cases had features that distinguished it from the other, and from the African-American case to which both are often compared.

Immigrants from Asia were entering a country with only a tiny number of preexisting Asian Americans—there were only about a million and a half at the time of the Celler Act in 1965, well under 1 percent of the population—yet a country with a history of anti-Asian prejudice that in some respects ran parallel to anti-black prejudice, even legally, and in other respects did not. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was the first nationally or ethnoracially group-specific restriction on immigration, and Asian immigrants generally remained ineligible to become naturalized citizens until 1952, when Congress finally abolished the white-only principle for naturalization that had been in place since 1790 and that courts had subsequently construed to apply to immigrants from India as well from East Asia.[40] Asians were never constitutionally enslaved, nor were they lynched in large numbers in the twentieth century, but some of the miscegenation statutes listed "Oriental" or "Mongolian" along with "Negro."[41] In southern states, this followed less from the presence of Asian ethnics—there were almost none in most southern states—than from doctrinal consistency.

Only in a few western states, especially California, was the prohibition of marriages between whites and Asians a serious project. Yet even California's miscegenation statute had been ruled unconstitutional by that state's own supreme court in 1948, nearly twenty years before *Loving v. Virginia* and even more distant from the new wave of immigrants from China, Korea, Vietnam, India, and other Asian nations that began to appear. By the time of that immigration, moreover, most white Americans who had an opinion about Japanese internment during World War II, the most notorious enactment of anti-Asian prejudice in popular memory, regarded that internment as a dreadful mistake, deserving even of reparations, which were in fact eventually paid.[42]

Hence the new immigrants from Asia were entering the country at a time when anti-Asian prejudice was in decline and when restrictions on Asian-white marriages were a distant memory in the parts of the country where most Asians had been living and where most of the new immigrants settled. These circumstances—taken together with the fact that many of the new immigrants from Asia had vibrant international kinship networks and marketable skills that quickly translated into strong class position—help explain the rapid incorporation of Asian ethnics into American society, even as measured by intermarriage. In the 1990 census, about half of the Asian Americans who had been born in the United States and were then

[40] The law had been modified in 1870 to provide for the naturalization of persons of African descent, but the bar to the naturalization of immigrants from Asia had been mitigated only by the 1943 provision of an annual quota of 105 Chinese immigrants attendant upon the repeal in that year of the Chinese Exclusion Act.

[41] Pascoe, "Miscegenation Law," 49, notes that fourteen states had included Asian Americans, under a variety of labels, at one time or another, and that nine did the same with "Maylays," the term long in use for Filipinos.

[42] The movement for reparations for Japanese-American internees came to climax in 1988 with the passage of the Civil Liberties Act (also known as the Japanese American Redress Bill), which authorized a payment of $20,000 to each victim of internment. Although this figure did not come close to compensating the interned persons for the amount of property loss suffered by many of them, it was an important symbolic gesture.

getting married were acquiring non-Asian spouses.[43] The high rate of Asian-white marriage blurs the line between these two descent communities, and thus speaks to the question of ethnoracial mixture behaviorally by exemplifying the relative ease of mixture even for a non-European group against which miscegenation laws were once on the books and members of which were thrown into concentration camps without a shred of due process even within my own lifetime.[44]

The expansion through immigration of the Hispanic or Latino descent community, too, speaks behaviorally to the question of ethnoracial mixture in a highly different context, yet in terms that eventually proved almost as challenging to the habit of taking the African-American case as a model for understanding and responding to the injustices done to other ethnoracially defined minorities. Part of what it meant to be Latino to begin with constituted a challenge to the American system of classification, because the category was less strictly color-marked. Immigrants from Mexico, by far the largest Latin American producer of immigrants to the United States, were understood to derive from two descent communities classified as races in the United States: Caucasian and Indian. The mixing of Spanish colonials from Europe with the indigenous population of the New World generated the notion of mestizo. The more Mexican Americans in the United States, as Gary Nash has observed, the less relevant were the old "racial" categories.[45]

This mixing of European and indigenous blood did not prevent the Latino population of the Southwest from being abused by Anglos, who found the Latinos different enough whatever they were made of. Segregated schools were common in the 1920s and 1930s in Texas, California, and Arizona. Texas citizens of Mexican descent were routinely prevented from serving on juries until 1954, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled, in *Hernandez v. Texas*, that the Fourteenth Amendment rights of Hispanics, even though said to be "white" by the state of Texas, were violated when Hispanics were excluded as a "class" from service on juries. Yet none of the miscegenation statutes mention Latinos by any of the names they might have been called. Latinos were usually regarded as legally white even when being stigmatized and mistreated. In court cases under miscegenation law, persons said by opposing counsel to be Negro, as Peggy Pascoe has shown, often insisted that they were actually Mexican. Much then depended on a court's assessment of the "pedigree," as it was often put, of a person whose marriage was under threat of annulment on the grounds of the alleged discovery of a partly black ancestry.[46]

The understanding that to be Mexican was to be legally white was so taken for granted in some settings that the plaintiff in the California suit that resulted in the invalidating of that state's miscegenation statute was herself a Mexican American. Andrea Perez, both of whose parents had been born in Mexico, sued several Los

[43] Reynolds Farley, "Racial Issues: Recent Trends in Residential Patterns and Intermarriage," in Neil Smelser and Jeffrey Alexander, eds., *Diversity and Its Discontents* (Princeton, N.J., 1999), 126. See also Roberto Suro, "Mixed Doubles," *American Demographics* (November 1999): 56–62.

[44] For a far-ranging discussion of out-marriage by Asian Americans, see Frank Wu, *Yellow: Race in America beyond Black and White* (New York, 2002), 261–300.

[45] Gary Nash, "Toward a Recognition of Mestizo America," *Journal of American History* 82 (December 1995): 941–62.

[46] Pascoe, "Miscegenation Law," 51–52.

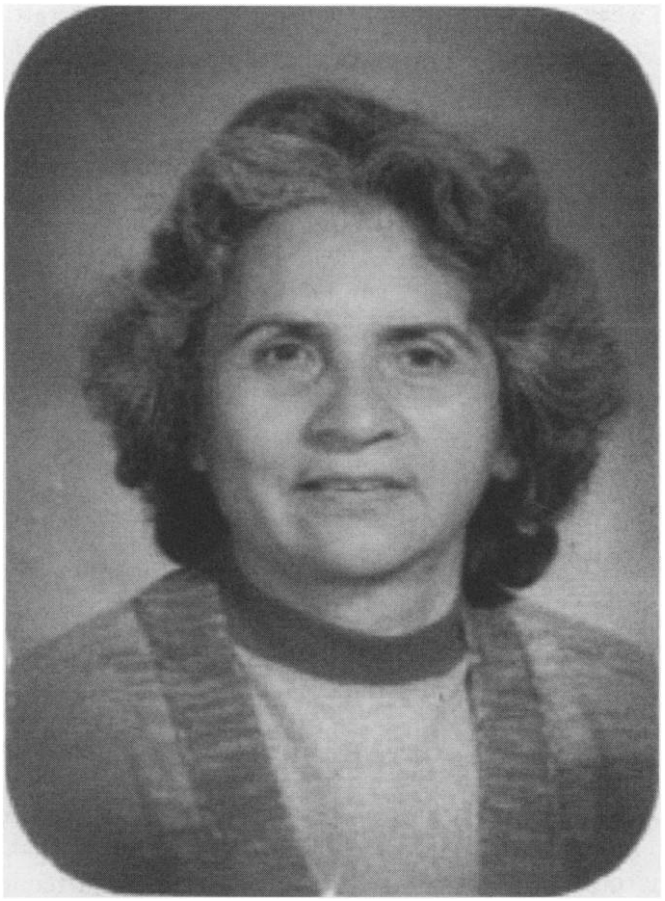

FIGURE 2: Andrea Perez in a 1982 staff photo, from Morningside Elementary School in Pacoima, California, where Perez worked as a bilingual teacher's aide while in her sixties. Photo courtesy of Dara Orenstein and Morningside Elementary School District. Perez was the plaintiff in the case that struck down California's miscegenation law in 1948 and set the frame for *Loving v. Virginia*. She met her black husband-to-be while working in an airplane assembly plant during World War II and remained married to him until her death in 2000.

Angeles County clerks for declining to issue a marriage license enabling her to marry a man who was black, whom she met on the assembly line in her capacity as a "Rosie the Riveter." (See Figure 2.) Right in the heart of the history of our question, then, in the pathbreaking case on which *Loving v. Virginia* was modeled, Latinos were sufficiently Caucasian that Perez's Mexican ancestry was not even mentioned in the case's documents and was rarely noted in newspapers other than those published by and for African Americans.[47] *Perez v. Sharp* is a reminder of how different California was from the states of the former Confederacy: its state supreme court actually threw out a miscegenation statute, and it did so a full decade before the Lovings were arrested and Hannah Arendt shocked New York liberals

[47] For accounts of Perez's suit and of press attention to it, see Mark Robert Brilliant, "Color Lines: Civil Rights Struggles on America's 'Racial Frontier,' 1945–1975" (PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 2002), 129; and Dara Orenstein, "Between the Lines: Mexicans, Miscegenation, and *Perez v. Sharp*," unpublished paper, 2002.

with her interest in the issue.[48] The situation was somewhat different in Texas, where Andrea Perez might well have been allowed to marry a black man. Mexicans "were rarely, if ever prosecuted" when they married blacks, as Neil Foley has explained, because Mexicans, while legally white, were "often regarded as non-white." Yet many "middle class Texas Mexicans," Foley summarizes, were eventually able to move "out of the ethnoracial borderlands between blackness and whiteness by constructing identities as Americans and embracing whiteness" because they, unlike African Americans, were not "racially marked as black" by "the so-called one-drop rule."[49]

Even in California, however, Mexican Americans had not been considered white when they wanted to marry Asians. Thus quite a number of Punjabi immigrants acquired Mexican-American spouses in the 1920s and 1930s because county clerks enforced the state's prohibition on Asian-white marriages only when the Asian Indians sought to marry Anglos. This anomaly is rendered all the more striking by the fact that the South Asian immigrants were technically Caucasian according to classic race theory, but in 1923 were declared by the U.S. Supreme Court to be non-white anyway.[50]

Yet the federal government was eventually obliged to recognize that some Latinos were on the black side of the black-white color line. Puerto Ricans and immigrants from Cuba and the Dominican Republic, for example, grew up in societies that did not mark the black-white color line sharply, with the result that, in the words adopted by the Census Bureau in 1970, "Hispanics can be of any race." This simple declarative, designed to acknowledge that some people the government classified as racially black were socially and culturally identified with Latin America, was remarkable in several respects. It subtly compromised the principle of hypodescent for blacks. It left intact the notion that white and black were racial rather than ethnic categories and that there was an important distinction between race and ethnicity. And it produced the awkward, antiphonal census category of "non-Hispanic white."[51] Thus the Bureau of the Census ended up designating the

[48] *Perez v. Sharp*, 32 Cal. 2d 711, 198 P.2d 17.

[49] Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997), 208, 211. See also Foley, "Becoming Hispanic: Mexican Americans and the Faustian Pact with Whiteness," in Foley, ed., *Reflexiones: New Directions in Mexican American Studies* (Austin, Tex., 1998), 53–70.

[50] For the South Asian and Latino mixture, see Karen Isaksen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia, 1992). A helpful discussion of the Supreme Court's 1923 ruling in *U.S. v. Thind* that South Asians were non-white can be found in Ian Haney Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York, 1996), 86–92. California officials were not always clear whether ethnic Filipinos were covered by the "Mongolian" provision of that state's anti-miscegenation statute. Decisions were made on a county-to-county basis until 1933, when the state's supreme court, responding to a suit brought by a Filipino American protesting the refusal of the Los Angeles County clerk's office to issue him a marriage license to marry a white woman, ruled that Filipinos were not covered. The legislature promptly added "Malay" to the statute. For California and Filipino Americans, see Leti Volpp, "American Mestizo: Filipinos and Anti-Miscegenation Laws in California," *University of California Davis Law Review* 33 (2000), rpt. in Johnson, *Mixed Race*, 86–93.

[51] A convenient listing of the Census Bureau's shifting categories from decade to decade is provided as an appendix to Melissa Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship: Race and the Census in Modern Politics* (Stanford, Calif., 2000), 187–90. For a probing discussion of the role of "blackness" within Latino political solidarities, see Silvio Torres-Saillant, "Problematic Paradigms: Racial Diversity and Corporate Identity in the Latino Community," in Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco and Mariela M. Paez, eds., *Latinos Remaking America* (Berkeley, Calif., 2002), 435–55.

white majority of the whole country not by a label designed specifically for it but by referring to what that majority was not. It is as if the only term one had for British people from outside Wales was "non-Welsh British."

The Latino case had other peculiarities. Latinos shared with Asian Americans a history free of legally recognized slavery within the United States, but, unlike immigrants from Asia, their immigration had not been decisively restricted. Mexicans, whose naturalization rights had been guaranteed by treaty in 1848 and whose inexpensive agricultural labor was sought by landowners in the Southwest, had been exempted from the epochal Immigration Restriction Act of 1924 that ended the massive immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe and made more rigid the exclusions of Asians that were already in place. Despite the resulting migration across the border, however, only 4.5 percent of the American population were Hispanic as registered by the census of 1970.[52]

That figure had gone up to 12.5 percent by 2000, thus bringing into much greater prominence a "racially" mixed community of descent that some Latino advocates insisted should be called a "race" of its own, subject to abandoning the biological understanding of race and replacing it with a more cultural one.[53] It is no wonder the government resisted this move, because if the race-ethnicity distinction were broken in the direction of classifying Latinos as a race, where else might this move lead? Were Jews, too, a race after all, because the Nazis, even if they got the theory wrong, managed to get the word right? What about Arabs? Armenians? Irish? Many scholars have long since adopted the terms "ethnoracial," "communities of descent," and "racialized groups" to refer to what were once called either "races" or "ethnic groups," recognizing the blurred, contingent, and constructed character of the relevant boundaries, but the Census Bureau and much of the American public remains in the thrall of the concept of race.[54]

In the meantime, more and more of the already mixed Latinos were getting married to non-Latinos. By the 1990 census, nearly one-third of Latinos born in the United States who were getting married were out-marrying.[55] By 2000, it was

[52] For a new study of the politics of the immigration restriction legislation of 1924, see M. M. Ngai, "The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law," *Journal of American History* 86 (1999): 67–92.

[53] For an exceptionally clear and well-informed discussion of the census categories and their relation to ethnoracial mixture, including a review of the specific issue of how to deal with Latinos, see Joel Perlmann, *Reflecting the Changing Face of America: Multiracials, Racial Classification, and American Intermarriage* (Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y., 1997).

[54] For an up-to-date, critical overview of the scientific utility of the concept of "race," see Joseph L. Graves, Jr., *The Emperor's New Clothes: Biological Theories of Race at the Millennium* (New Brunswick, N.J., 2001). See also the pointed interventions of James F. Crow and Ernest Mayr, in *Daedalus* (Winter 2002): 81–88 and 89–94, and by Bruce Wallace in the Spring 2002 issue (144–46) of the same journal. Although the characterization of race as a "social construction" rather than a biological reality has been a mantra in recent decades for people who defend the continued use of "race," a difficulty is that the term long maintained its currency in the English language as a way of denoting exactly those features of a human being that cannot be changed by social conditions, as in the saying, "The leopard cannot change its spots" (which derives from an ancient commentary on skin color, Jeremiah 13: 23, which reads: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the Leopard his spots?"). Hence a term with an imposing history of denoting a permanent, physically embedded, "natural kind" is asked now to refer to contingent social relationships that many advocates of the word's continued use believe can and should be changed. In this context, some discussants (for example, Blum, *"I'm Not a Racist,"* esp. 147–63) now refer to "racialized groups" instead of "races."

[55] Farley, "Racial Issues," 126; Suro, "Mixed Doubles," 58.

clearer than ever that out-marriage for Latinos increased with the number of years north of the border, and with levels of education and income. The Latinos least likely to out-marry were the most poorly educated of recent immigrants (often illegal) and their children, whose chances of getting ahead were diminished by the decay of the public school system and other public services in California and elsewhere in the Southwest. The Latino case thus confirms the implications of the Asian-American case that class position exercises enormous influence over the relative stability of ethnoracial boundaries.

That the weak class position of most African Americans owes much to the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow has long been understood, but the formidable role of miscegenation law in that legacy is not widely appreciated. The defense of slaves as property is what inspired not only hypodescent but also miscegenation law itself as first developed in the Chesapeake colonies during the seventeenth century. The governments of the slave-intensive colonies and their successor states did not try very hard to prevent the birth of children with black mothers and white fathers, but they did act to make it difficult for the children of such unions to achieve any right to inheritance. As Eva Saks has established on the basis of an analysis of the entire history of the relevant court cases, fear of property loss was a driving force behind the prohibition on black-white marriage. And so it remained right down to the Civil War. Emancipation deprived the white southerners of their property in the form of slave chattels, but these white southerners could protect much of the rest of their property and recreate some of the social and economic conditions of slavery by preventing most descendants of black-white sexual unions from advancing inheritance claims. The ex-Confederates did this by legally marking all of the issue of their former slaves as permanently and exclusively black and by prohibiting any black person from marrying a white person. Hence all children of black-white couplings were bastards, and under the law in many jurisdictions they had no claim to inheritance. Jim Crow–era legislators and judges, as Saks shows, knew full well what was at stake. Six of the Reconstruction state governments had repealed the miscegenation statutes of the slave era, but as soon as the Republicans withdrew federal power in 1877—not to deliver it again for eighty years, when President Eisenhower did it at Little Rock—the former slaveholders and their allies regained control, and promptly reenacted and sharpened the slave era's prohibitions on black-white marriage.[56]

The combination of hypodescent with the denial to blacks residing in many states with large black populations of any opportunity for legal marriage to whites ensured that the color line would long remain to a very large extent a property line. Hence the dynamics of *race* formation and the dynamics of *class* formation were, in this most crucial of all American cases, largely the same. This is one of the most important truths about the history of the United States brought into sharper focus when that history is viewed through the lens of the question of ethnoracial mixture.

[56] Eva Saks, "Representing Miscegenation Law," *Raritan* 8 (Fall 1988): 39–69.

IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS TRUTH, it cannot be repeated often enough that miscegenation law generally treated Latinos as white, and it was applied with little consistency to Indians and Asians. To be sure, marital and legal reproductive freedoms for Indians and Asian Americans were restricted in some states for a number of years. But these restrictions did not perpetuate the social and economic conditions of slavery, and thus had a less profound effect on class position. Moreover, the bulk of the Latino and Asian-American population of the United States today are either immigrants or the children of immigrants, not the descendants of families who were directly affected by the miscegenation laws of state governments within the United States. To recognize these differences is not to obscure the injustice inflicted on non-black descent groups, which historians have amply documented. But it is to confront the peculiar circumstances, duration, and class-consolidating consequences of anti-black racism. The power of this particular variety of racism to perform such extreme racialization and economic domination derived from the fact that black people, and they alone, were overwhelmingly the descendants of men and women who had been pieces of property in the British colonies and in the United States, and that these black people, unlike immigrants of all colors, even those from Mexico, had little choice but to reside in the country in which their ancestors had been enslaved, and that they, unlike Indians, carried no mystique of the new American Eden.

Yet these differences in the historical experience of the several American minority descent groups sometimes have been hidden from view as we react in horror to the evils of white racism wholesale. This happened during the 1960s when the nation's system of anti-racist programs was organized and during the 1970s when these programs were consolidated and the political alliances supporting these programs were cemented. At those historical moments, significantly, almost nobody wanted to look at the society and history of the United States through the lens of our question.

Legal and educational initiatives primarily designed with African Americans in mind were extended to other historically disadvantaged ethnoracial minorities, implicitly color-coded as yellow, brown, and red. People in each of these color groups had been dreadfully mistreated, after all, and were still the victims of prejudice in many contexts. It was convenient to apply to those groups the basic approach already worked out for black Americans. As John D. Skrentny has shown, the assumption that this or that group was "like blacks" drove the "minority rights revolution" in certain directions, while the failure of the black analogy to gain credibility in relation to some other classes of well-mobilized disadvantaged persons limited the scope of that revolution.[57]

Although the decision to expand the range of Affirmative Action beyond the black population was taken in the 1960s by government bureaucrats with little pressure from political organizations devoted to advancing the interests of Asian Americans, Latinos, and Indians, such organizations usually welcomed these expansions once effected, and in the 1970s they became forces behind the defense

[57] John D. Skrenty, *The Minority Rights Revolution* (New York, 2002). See also the essays collected in Skrentny, ed., *Color Lines: Affirmative Action, Immigration, and Civil Rights Options for America* (Chicago, 2001).

of Affirmative Action programs. A conglomerate of minority advocacy organizations seemed like a good political investment. And at exactly the time that these lobby groups and the governmental and educational officials who responded to their concerns were acting, black Americans were asserting themselves vigorously as a group, showing more interest in group solidarity than in the problematic character of the one-drop rule. The black model as understood in the early 1970s—by African-American advocacy organizations as well as by public officials and courts—carried the assumption of sharp group boundaries as facts of life and did not offer a challenge to such boundaries as historically contingent constructions.[58] Indeed, to proceed otherwise was potentially to deny to victims of white racism the benefits they were due: if the one-drop rule defined discrimination, it naturally defined anti-discrimination remedies.

What came to be called Affirmative Action and multiculturalism were both predicated on the sense that ethnoracial groups were clearly bounded, durable entities. This sense was strongly reinforced throughout the 1970s by negative representations of the very ideal of assimilation, which as supervised by Anglo-Protestants was said to have robbed immigrant groups, especially Catholics from Ireland, Poland, and Italy, of their cultural heritage. Michael Novak's 1971 bestseller, *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics*, gave voice to the notion that what really called for defense was the integrity of groups rather than the opportunity to cross the boundaries between them.[59] In 1972, Congress passed the Ethnic Heritage Studies Act, providing federal funds for programs that would study the culture of ethnic groups. Sociologists sometimes interpreted this upsurge of European ethnicities as largely a symbolic affirmation of old world images facilitated by the very extent of the assimilation experienced by the ethnicity-affirming populations, and asserted that the upsurge was in some respects a "backlash" against official attention to the needs of black people.[60] Yet these anti-assimilationist, culturally particularist gestures on the part of many European-derived descent groups rendered all the more credible the multiculturalist and Affirmative Action initiatives that played to the enduring integrity of each community of descent. Educational initiatives as well as entitlement programs were better able to get moving if one supposed the society to be divided up in easily managed, often color-coded groups, each possessed of its own culture.[61]

[58] The somewhat different perspective advanced by leaders of African-American organizations in different periods is illustrated by the praise black leaders of the late 1940s gave to Sinclair Lewis's *Kingsblood Royal*, a novel that was in fact based on the life of the light-skinned Walter White, president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Although the novel's devastating critique of anti-black racism and the illogic of the one-drop rule found little white support, Lewis's implication that blackness was a social construct was welcomed by many black Americans, as readers of the *New York Times* were recently reminded by Brent Staples, "When the Bard of 'Main Street' Turned the Kingsbood Family Black," *New York Times* (August 18, 2002): IV, 12. For a sound analysis of the novel and the difficulties white critics of the 1940s had in understanding it, see Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 265–71. Lewis in effect drew Norman Rockwell's family tree with a black face in it.

[59] Michael Novak, *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics* (New York, 1971).

[60] The most influential intervention to this effect was Herbert Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2 (1979): 1–20.

[61] It should be noted that the unique historical and constitutional situation of American Indians was widely recognized by Congress and the federal courts during this period, even while American Indians were commonly incorporated into the educational and entitlement programs described here. The

But in this wholesome rush to recognize diversity while reducing it to a manageable set of monoliths, questions that later proved to be important were not asked. As Skrentny, Hugh Davis Graham, and other scholars have documented, the officials who added one group or another to the list of those targeted for a particular entitlement provided few explanations for their often sweeping directives and rulings, held almost no public hearings to air the issues, and generally failed to think through the theoretical basis of their decisions.[62] Just what groups should benefit from group-specific entitlements and on the basis of what justification? What specific characteristics marked an individual as a member of a designated group? What was the significance of mixed descent? Were new immigrants as eligible as the descendants of slaves, and, if so, on the basis of what analysis of the relation of their particular descent community to the prior and present actions of the United States and its citizens?

As a result of the failure to address these questions, especially the last one, 26 million Asian and Latin American immigrants and their children eventually found themselves eligible for at least some Affirmative Action benefits simply by virtue of the fact that they had come from Panama or Taiwan or the Philippines rather than from Iraq or Greece or Russia. There was virtually no public debate on the issue of immigrant eligiblity for ethnoracially defined entitlements. Political opponents of Affirmative Action sometimes called attention to examples of well-to-do, highly educated immigrants taking up minority set-aside business contracts in programs that had won approval on the grounds that they would assist American-born blacks. But the intent was almost always to undermine all of Affirmative Action rather than to distinguish between its justification for blacks and its justification for immigrants and their children.[63] Federal agencies and courts—along with many multicultural education programs carrying out "affirmative action for cultures"—operated on the basis of an implicit calculus of victimization, but they shrank from the task of following through, of actually developing the calculus and offering it for public scrutiny.

To be sure, the pivotal political and administrative decisions were taken when the population of Asian Americans and Latinos was tiny—less than 1 percent of Americans were listed as of Asian descent in the census of 1970, and only 4.5 percent were Latinos—and before officials, civil rights leaders, and policy intellectuals had any inkling that the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 would produce so many immigrants from Asia and Latin America. Had the Asian-

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passage in 1978 of the Indian Child Welfare Act is an example of Indian-specific measures developed during the 1970s.

[62] Hugh Davis Graham, *Collision Course: The Strange Convergence of Affirmative Action and Immigration Policy in America* (New York, 2002); John D. Skrentny, "Affirmative Action and New Demographic Realities," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (February 16, 2001).

[63] One Republican senator attempting to discredit all of Affirmative Action observed that the wealthiest monarch in the world, the Borneo-based sultan of Brunei, would be in principle eligible for Affirmative Action if he immigrated to the United States. For this incident, and for an analysis of the decision of most Republicans to live with Affirmative Action despite its lack of popularity with voters, see John D. Skrentny, "Republican Efforts to End Affirmative Action: Walking a Fine Line," in Martin A. Levin, *et al.*, *Seeking the Center: Politics and Policymaking at the New Century* (Washington, D.C., 2001), 132–71. For examples of press coverage of European immigrants (especially from Portugal) who obtained contracts under Affirmative Action programs, see Graham, *Collision Course*, 154–55.

American and Latino populations remained as steady as the African-American population, the extension of entitlements to these other groups might not have put the system under such pressure. But the millions of ethnoracially Asian and Latino immigrants revolutionized the meaning of descent-defined entitlements. The number of Americans potentially eligible for at least some Affirmative Action programs more than doubled even during the decades that Affirmative Action for American-born blacks was under increasing political pressure, and even as the relative ease with which the children of immigrants from Asia and Latin America mixed with Americans of European descent shattered the myth that all non-European ethnoracial groups in America were as tightly bounded as the black group, whose borders were kept tidy by the historically anomalous practice of hypodescent racialization.

Perhaps an intellectually coherent and politically viable argument could have been developed for entitlement programs for non-blacks, including some newly arriving immigrants. There was no shortage of abuses to be enumerated and assessed, nor was evidence lacking that many whites were prejudiced against persons of Asian or Latin American descent. White privilege was real, and there were good reasons to design programs to combat its power. But such an argument on behalf of policies serving non-blacks was not developed with sufficient specificity to preserve the special claims of African Americans, whose interests virtually all policymakers in the 1960s assumed was the point of the entire entitlement conversation.[64] Hence later on, when immigrant eligibility for Affirmative Action programs exposed the entire system of ethnoracially targeted entitlements to be a jerry-built, poorly theorized edifice quite different from what President Lyndon Johnson and his Great Society associates had in mind, and no longer subject to viable defense on the powerful grounds of the distinctive history of African Americans, it was too late to save Affirmative Action for African Americans except on the piecemeal basis to which political pressures of several kinds had reduced it by the end of the 1990s.

In the meantime, defenders of Affirmative Action rarely focused on immigrant eligibility for entitlement programs, and concentrated instead on charging opponents of Affirmative Action with trying to perpetuate white privilege. No doubt this charge was often true, but this emphasis in the defense of Affirmative Action also dodged the increasing complexity of the actual politics in which group preferences were embedded.[65] The edifice of ethnoracially defined entitlements had been

[64] Just how far the need to clarify the basis for entitlements for non-blacks was from almost everyone's mind is indicated by the character of the discussion that took place in 1965 at the single hearing held by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on EEO–1, the precedent-setting employer reporting form that became the model for later Affirmative Action documents throughout federal and state officialdoms and in the private sector. Although this form was defined by the four classic "minorities" of the ethnoracial pentagon that were made general to the entire federal bureaucracy in 1977 through the legendary Statistical Directive No. 15 of the Office of Management and Budget, no voice at the hearing commented even in passing on the non-black minorities. Everyone assumed the non-black groups to be so tiny a part of the picture as to require no discussion and to entail no policy dilemmas in the future. I owe this information about the EEOC hearing to John D. Skrentny.

[65] A prominent example of a vigorous mid-1990s defense of Affirmative Action that avoids the issue of immigrant eligibility is Stephen Steinberg, *Turning Back: The Retreat from Racial Justice in American Thought and Policy* (Boston, 1995). Steinberg deals extensively with immigration, which he sees as largely damaging to African Americans. But he treats Affirmative Action itself as if it applied only to

designed architecturally by practical bureaucrats who did not foresee the potential scope of the edifice's operations; then, the political defense of the edifice against those who would dismantle it had been taken up by a multi-group coalition that tried to make the old design work despite increasingly apparent differences among the groups the edifice had come to serve.

A major consequence of this post-1960s episode in mixture avoidance and minority group equivalency was that the American public gradually lost its grip on an insight that had been prominent when the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were passed by large, bipartisan majorities in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. That insight was that the descent community of African Americans was historically unique. Only blacks inherit a multi-century legacy of group-specific enslavement and hypodescent racialization long carried out under constitutional authority in the United States. But the monolithic character of white racism has been so taken for granted that white racism has been assigned the same capacity often assigned to a single drop of black blood: the capacity to define equally whatever it touched, no matter how the affected entity was constituted and what its life circumstances might have been. We might call it the principle of white racist hypovictimization, or the one-hate rule. To become aware of the one-hate rule's ironic relation to the one-drop rule is not to imply that the damage done by honest efforts to combat white racism by treating it monolithically is remotely on the same scale as the damage done by hypodescent racialization. But this irony is another feature of the history of the United States that comes into clearer focus when that history is seen through the lens of the question of ethnoracial mixture.[66]

THERE IS YET MORE TO SEE through the lens of our question if we hold our gaze a bit longer and broaden its scope. By looking back from recent census data on the whole sweep of American history, prepared now to discern mixture even where it was denied by historical actors, we can see unfolding a human drama for which the vocabulary of the melting pot is not adequate, nor that of miscegenation, nor that of blood quantum. The concept of "assimilation," too, is insufficient, not only on account of its implication of a one-way process of newcomers adapting to an unchanging, prior society but also because the concept as commonly understood does not incorporate the prodigious black-white mixing masked by hypodescent racialization.[67] Nor do the recently popular, ahistorical figures of speech, "mosaic"

African Americans, and thus his arguments for its perpetuation, which are grounded in an analysis of the history of that single group, do not speak directly to the specific programs that were being diminished and abolished.

[66] This article was completed before the appearance of Peter Kolchin's judicious "Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America," *Journal of American History* 89 (June 2002): 154–73. It is possible that more attention to the history of ethnoracial mixture can consolidate the historiographical advances Kolchin summarizes and address more forthrightly some of the desiderata he identifies.

[67] Yet the concept of assimilation, long maligned, is now being defended in ways that better enable it to convey part of the story I am calling "amalgamation." See Russell A. Kazel, "Revisiting Assimilation: The Rise, Fall, and Reappraisal of a Concept in American Ethnic History," *AHR* 100

or "salad bowl," begin to capture the decidedly temporal, dialectical drama that should be recognized as a major theme in the history of the United States, and that should again be called by its proper name: amalgamation.

That drama of amalgamation is behind the 1990 census reports I have already mentioned, indicating out-marriage rates for young Latinos born in the United States at about 33 percent and for Asian Americans at about 50 percent.[68] On the same charts, the out-marriage rate for American Indians is about 60 percent. The experience of the European descent communities who entered the United States in large numbers during the great 1880–1924 migration is also highly pertinent. By the 1990s, persons who identified themselves as having Italian ancestry were acquiring spouses without any such ancestry at a rate of 73 percent, according to demographer Reynolds Farley, and the comparable figure for those with Polish ancestry was 81 percent.[69] Further from descent-group boundary maintenance are the descendants of the even earlier generations of migrants from Ireland, Germany, and Scandinavia. Further still are the descendants of immigrants from England, Scotland, and Wales, the subdivisions of Great Britain that once seemed important to Anglo-Americans. These varieties of white assimilation are often taken for granted as we contemplate the very different experience of non-European descent communities, but in world-historical perspective this mixing of Europeans, too, is far from trivial.

The case of Jewish Americans invites special attention in view of the fact that Jews, more than Italians and Poles, and the other groups who comprised the migration from Eastern and Southern Europe, were subject to extensive, legally sanctioned discrimination in housing, public accommodations, education, and employment as recently as World War II. In 1940, Jewish Americans were marrying non-Jews at a rate of about 3 percent but, by 1990, were doing so at a rate of well over 50 percent.[70] Since Jewish Americans have very strong class position, their experience can remind us, once again, that class position often advances or retards rates of intermarriage.

The Census Bureau tells us that only about 6 percent of African Americans—defined by the hypodescent standard—were acquiring non-black spouses by 1990.[71] The final report on this aspect of the 2000 census is yet to be released, but

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(April 1995): 437–71; Richard Alba, "Assimilation's Quiet Tide," *Public Interest* (Spring 1995); Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbaut, *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* (Berkeley, Calif., 2001), esp. chap. 3, "Not Everyone Is Chosen: Segmented Assimilation and Its Determinants," 44–69.

[68] Out-marriage rates differ considerably within these color-coded descent groups. About 60 percent of persons of Cuban and Puerto Rican ancestry born in the United States marry non-Latino spouses. Persons of Filipino and Korean ancestry born in the United States acquire non-Asian spouses at about the same rate. Mexican and Chinese out-marriage rates are lower. See Jerry Jacobs and Teresa Labov, "Gender Differentials in Intermarriage among Sixteen Race and Ethnic Groups," *Sociological Forum* (forthcoming, 2003).

[69] Farley, "Racial Issues," 126.

[70] For the 1940 figure, see Arthur Goren, "Jews," *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), 596; for 1990, see Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, *Jews and the New American Scene* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), 72. Lipset and Raab rely on the National Jewish Population Study of 1990, which reported that 57 percent of the Jews who had married during the five years previous to 1990 had married non-Jews.

[71] Farley, "Racial Issues," 126.

preliminary assessments place the figure at about 10 percent.[72] Why is the black out-marriage rate so much lower today than the rate for other ethnoracial minorities? Although weak class position on the part of most blacks and an enduring prejudice against blacks on the part of most whites are no doubt prominent factors, and would fit with most of the sociological theory on the dynamics of mixture, there is surely more to it than that. Some blacks have their own reasons for seeking black spouses. This can be true for any community of descent, as internal community adhesives are often compelling. But there are obvious historical reasons why some American blacks, as opposed to members of groups based on immigration, might want as little as possible to do with American whites, today and perhaps for a very long time into the future.[73]

Yet when we look at the statistics, we cannot fail to notice that the rate of black-white marriage is now considerably greater—several times greater—than the rate of Jewish-gentile marriage only sixty years ago. And we need to remember that not everyone who cohabits and reproduces gets married. The percentage of the American population—white and black, and even yellow and brown and red—that is getting married at all is diminishing. Non-marital cohabitation across ethnoracial lines is generally believed to be even more common than marriage across ethnoracial lines, but the data is less definitive.

Even so, the extent of ethnoracial mixing registered in the marriage statistics of the federal censuses of 1990 and 2000, taken together with the growing willingness to accept as real the black-white mixing—including that created by the massive rape of slave females—that has gone into the genetic making of the African-American population, invites us to see the history of the United States as, among other things, a story of amalgamation, however episodic and however given to the greater bonding of some elements than others. To speak of "amalgamation" as a major theme in U.S. history is to reclaim the vocabulary of Wendell Phillips and Frederick Douglass and Ralph Waldo Emerson, to renounce the Jim Crow distinction between miscegenation and the melting pot, to integrate the story of black-white mixing with the story of other kinds of mixing, to escape the implications of Anglo-conformity often historically associated with the figure of the melting pot, to recognize a dynamic interaction not captured by the more limited concept of assimilation, and to deny at long last the legitimacy of the principle of hypodescent.

Amalgamation in the history of the United States has been episodic and segmented. Not every tribe in the United States has mixed equally with each other, or at the same pace, or with equal agency, or has faced the same obstacles and inhibitions and incentives and disincentives. Not every mixture has had an equal impact on the whole. Hence the old myth of the melting pot is at once deeply false and deeply true. To confront these features of the process of amalgamation and to understand the specific role played in that process by hypodescent racialization is to integrate the story of physical mixing with the story of racism and anti-racism. It is a mistake to treat these two narratives as rivals, with the story of physical mixing

[72] That black-white marriages had increased by about 70 percent during the decade of the 1990s was reported by the Census Bureau in its report "Interracial Married Couples," June 29, 2001: in 1990, there were 211,000 black-white married couples, and in 2000 there were 363,000.

[73] Randall Kennedy critically discusses disagreements among African Americans concerning mixture-related issues in "Interracial Intimacy," *Atlantic* (December 2002): 103–10.

allowed to license political complacency ("We don't need policies to deal with the effects of racism, because we can just let nature take its course"), and the story of racism and anti-racism allowed to license calls for struggle ("We must mobilize to defeat racism"). The greater acceptance of descent mixture in our own time is obviously a result of the political struggle that has diminished racism in the United States. Its emergence cannot be explained apart from that struggle for ethnoracial equality.

The national experience with intimacy across ethnoracial lines has been one of amalgamation *interruptus*: irregular, stutter-step, tension-filled, and sometimes violent, and thus quite different from the spontaneous, relatively relaxed intimacy leading to closure so often celebrated under the sign of the melting pot. But it has been amalgamation nevertheless, and on a scale and within a time frame that gives it a strong claim to being one of the central features of the history of the United States when viewed in comparative perspective. A number of other nations have experienced large measures of mixture. Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, New Zealand, and Canada are prominent examples, each with its own history of our question deserving of the world's attention. But the United States is at least an important case in which a large number of descent groups deriving from a great range of points of origin have blended. If demographic mixture is a theme more prominent in the modern history of the Western Hemisphere than of the Eastern, the amalgamation narrative foregrounds the features of the United States that most make it an "American" nation rather than an expansion of a Europe in which nationality and descent continue to go together more often than not.[74]

This mixture-centered view of the history of the United States contrasts vividly with what is at once the most Western Hemisphere–preoccupied and the most conspicuously census-inspired of all interpretations of American history, the frontier thesis. Frederick Jackson Turner developed this interpretation on the basis of the census of 1890 finding that what had been the territory beyond white settlements was now made up of organized counties with enough people in them to be enumerated in the census. This led Turner to reflect on the significance of uninhabited land, which he declared to be the fostering of the individualism and democracy that, he believed, had made the United States what it was. The narrative of the frontier was keyed by the encounter of Europeans with a geographical environment defined by the absence of people. Indians did not really count as people, as their land was uninhabited by Turner's definition.[75] Yet the narrative of amalgamation is antithetical: it is keyed instead by the encounter of human beings with each other, across the lines of many communities of descent, in a series of

[74] For a defense of the idea that "miscegenation comes close to epitomizing the American experience," in both Latin America and North America, see Earl E. Fitz, "From Blood to Culture: Miscegenation as Metaphor for the Americas," in Monika Kaup and Debra J. Rosenthal, eds., *Mixing Race, Mixing Culture: Inter-American Literary Dialogues* (Austin, Tex., 2002), 243–72, esp. 244. This hemisphere-centered analysis is also an example of the continued use in some quarters of "miscegenation" as a neutral term.

[75] Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" [1893], rpt. in Fulmer Mood, ed., *The Early Writings of Frederick Jackson Turner* (Madison, Wis., 1938), 183–232. My understanding of the historical significance of the Turner thesis has been influenced by Kerwin L. Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination: Narrating the European Conquest of Native America, 1890–1990* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997).

intimacies and counter-intimacies fostered by a range of economic and cultural forces.

Hence I invoke Turner not because his ideas are sufficiently alive today to demand refutation, nor to suggest that amalgamation and hypodescent are strong enough concepts to perform the range of analytic tasks Turner and his disciples asked the concept of the frontier to perform, but simply to underscore the difference between Turner's historiographical era and ours. The narrative of the frontier was remarkable for avoiding people and the specific terms of their action upon each other. The frontier thesis purported to explain the course of American history without much attention to the slavery question, and Turner boldly turned the tables on the Civil War–preoccupied historians of his day by explaining the end of slavery as a function of the frontier, in the person of the man Turner called the greatest westerner of all, Abe Lincoln of Illinois. The frontier thesis was the most popular during exactly the years when the Jim Crow system was the least contested, from the 1890s through the 1930s. The Turner thesis invited white northerners and white southerners to unite in thinking about America together, without being distracted by disagreements about black Americans. The most influential of the Jim Crow era's historians of slavery, Ulrich B. Phillips, who is now remembered for the overbearing racism of his account, was a doctoral advisee of Turner's. Yet the narrative of amalgamation visible in the writings of many historians of our own time[76] concentrates on the people and the relationships that Turner ignored, and on the behavioral and discursive answers Americans have offered to the question of ethnoracial mixture during the 110 years since he wrote.

These multiple answers, taken together, support the consensus of contemporary social science that the communities of descent sometimes called either racial or ethnic are highly contingent entities, with boundaries more subject to state power than was normally supposed by earlier generations, whose members were often blind to their own agency in creating and preserving these boundaries, taking as primordial the stuff of history that they themselves had helped to make. Yet nothing in American history calls into question the truism that boundaries are necessary, or that the maintenance of any solidarity requires exclusions as well as inclusions. And in an era of global dynamics, the challenge of drawing the "circle of the we" is more central than ever: where to try to draw what boundaries, with whom, and around what?[77]

This issue is now prominent on the agendas of many societies around the world, especially in European nations increasingly populated by immigrants from Asia, the Middle East, and the Caribbean. The history of the United States is potentially instructive in this contemporary setting not because this nation has drawn its social boundaries wisely or justly—far from it. It is beyond the scope of this essay to try

[76] Although specialized studies consistent with this view of the history of the United States abound, attempts at synthesis remain rare. One breezy but helpfully provocative effort to outline a national story emphasizing the theme of amalgamation, offered frankly as a "speculation," is in the final chapter of Michael Lind, *The Next American Nation: The New Nationalism and the Fourth American Revolution* (New York, 1995), 352–88.

[77] I have argued for the centrality of this issue in "How Wide the Circle of the We: American Intellectuals and the Problem of the Ethnos since World War II," *AHR* 98 (April 1993): 317–37; and *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*, 2d edn., expanded (New York, 2000).

to outline what the world might make of the American story of amalgamation and hypodescent. But I suspect that among the most important "lessons of American history," if that phrasing is not too strong, is one as humbling as it is hopeful: the history of the United States shows that even a nation carrying a heavy load of racism can incorporate individuals from an imposing variety of communities of descent on terms of considerable intimacy. The case of the United States implicitly refuses to let other nations off the hook that is presented to all immigrant-receiving democracies by the egalitarian ideals for which Western Europe has been so vital a cradle.

Among the Americans who have understood that European ideological heritage, especially as it came to the United States directly from England, was Herman Melville. He was also a fierce prophet of America's role as an agent of the further development, if not the perfection, of English liberty. The long-term world-historical mission of the United States was to "forever extinguish the prejudices of national dislikes," Melville proclaimed in 1849. This great contemporary of Wendell Phillips, Frederick Douglass, and Ralph Waldo Emerson envisaged a future in which the dispersed children of Adam and Eve would find each other in America, there to experience under the ordinance of democracy a Pentecostal moment. All the tribes of the earth will testify with cloven tongues of fire to their common humanity, yet the language in which they will speak, said Melville, will be "the language of Britain."[78] And so, in a manner and with many interruptions, and up to a point, it has been.

But we must distinguish between the empirically warranted narrative of amalgamation, punctuated as it is by hypodescent racialization, and the extravagance of the amalgamation fantasy. The latter is increasingly common in the public culture of the United States today. We see it in journalistic accounts not only of the lives of Tiger Woods, Mariah Carey, and other mixed-descent celebrities but also of the cross-color marriages by leading politicians. Some commentators predict that ethnoracial distinctions in the United States will disappear in the twenty-first century. Perhaps they are right, but there is ample cause to doubt it. And a glance at the history of Brazil, where physical mixing even of blacks and whites has magnificently failed to achieve social justice and to eliminate a color hierarchy, should chasten those who expect too much from mixture alone. Moreover, inequalities by descent group are not the only kind of inequalities. In an epoch of diminished economic opportunities and of apparent hardening of class lines, the diminution of racism may leave many members of historically disadvantaged ethnoracial groups in deeply unequal relation to whites simply by virtue of class position. Even the end of racism at this point in history would not necessarily ensure a society of equals.

Fortunately, the distinction between the fantasy and the historical narrative is not hard to draw. Even Hollywood, in its best moments, can draw it. In *Bulworth*, a popular motion picture of 1998, forty years after Hannah Arendt's indiscretion, an indiscreet senator tells a national television audience that racism can be ended by wholesale intermarriage. "All we need," said Warren Beatty's Senator Bulworth, "is

[78] Herman Melville, *Redburn* (London, 1986), 240. See also Acts 2: 1–21.

a voluntary, free-spirited, open-ended program of procreative racial deconstruction."[79] But the filmmakers shrewdly inserted these lines in a speech that the senator delivered while seized by a truth-telling dementia. So, we are to believe that there is a measure of truth to what he says, but you have to be crazy to say it. And that is where the United States enters the twenty-first century: wise enough to know how far it is from fulfilling Melville's prophecy but crazy enough to believe in it, at least part of the time.

[79] *Bulworth*, a film by Warren Beatty, 1998.

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