Of Double-Blooded Birth: A History of Mixed-Race Women in the United States during the Early Twentieth Century

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Abstract

Often homogenised into broader narratives of African-American history, the historical experience of mixed-race women of black-white descent forms the central research focus of this thesis. Examining the lives of such women offers a valuable insight into how notions of race, class, gender and physical aesthetics were understood, articulated and negotiated throughout the United States during the early-twentieth century.

Through an analysis of wide-ranging primary source material, from letters, diaries and autobiographies to advertisements, artwork and unpublished poetry, this thesis provides an interdisciplinary contribution to the field of Critical Mixed Race Studies, and African-American history. It builds on existing interpretations of the Harlem Renaissance by considering the significance of mixed-racial heritage on the formation of literature produced by key individuals over the period. Moreover, this research reveals that many of the visual and literary sources typically studied in isolation in fact informed one another, and had a profound impact on how factors such as beauty, citizenship, and respectability intersected, and specifically influenced the lives of mixed-race women. It also hones in on the lives of two biracial women born to a white mother and black father, and shows their existence defied dominant societal norms in a more discernible way than those whose mixed-race heritage resulted from an interracial interaction several generations ago.

At a time when the mixed-race body was used to shape the ideologies of eugenicists, legislators and creatives alike, women who occupied this corporeality sought to reclaim agency by writing themselves and their experience into existence, and by crafting alternative racial identities more aligned to their own understanding of race. Ultimately, this thesis complicates existing analyses of race and identity by situating the voices of mixed-race women within their historical and theoretical context, and considering the ways in which they navigated the complex racial politics which defined the period.

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A Note on Terminology

Throughout this dissertation, the use of the word 'mixed-race' will be used to refer to individuals of mixed black-white racial heritage. While acknowledging that other variations of mixed-race ancestry exist, and that the label of mixed-race is increasingly considered problematic and untenable, for the purpose of this research the term will be used specifically to denote people of black-white descent. The term 'biracial' will also be used where relevant to refer to those born to a black and white parent in the United States.

Historical and colloquial classifications for women of varying degrees of mixed-racial descent, such as 'mulatto,' 'mulatress,' 'mulatta,' 'quadroon,' and 'octoroon,' will also be employed in quotations throughout the analysis. It should be noted that while the author acknowledges that these terms are now out-dated, their citation is solely for academic purposes and not intended to cause offense.

In addition, the terms 'African-American,' 'black,' and 'Negro' will be used interchangeably and where appropriate to denote individuals or communities with African-descent; while 'white' will refer to people of Caucasian, Euro-American descent.

Finally, this dissertation will follow the methodology of historian Peggy Pascoe, and similarly posit that as the invention of the term 'miscegenation' marked a highly-significant point in a longer history of interracial marriage laws, it will be used to mark the rhetoric employed by contemporaries during this particular period.[1]

[1] Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America,* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009) p.13

Introduction

The mixed-race female body has long been a site of social, political, and cultural contestation in the United States of America. Often bearing the long and tortured histories of sexual violence, patriarchal power, and white racial privilege, biracial women present complex and complicated histories of race relations in the United States, not only because of their dual heritage but their ability – through childbirth – to carry these silent stories through the generations. Yet, the lived realities of existing as a biracial woman in a patriarchal America defined by the racial binary of black/white have, until fairly recently, been overlooked in the historical scholarship.

The documented experiences of biracial women throughout American history has been marginalised for a variety of reasons. One explanation for this silencing might be attributed to white guilt over the shameful histories of racial slavery and the sexual violence and power that was integral to its existence. Alternatively, many historians interested in race relations in the United States have constructed a teleological narrative presenting a homogenous black civil rights movement, relying on the binary of black/white and subsequently overlooking important questions of racial heterogeneity in the 'black' community and the experiences of that in different historical contexts.

This thesis will therefore focus upon the experiences of mixed-race and biracial women within the United States during the early twentieth century. By highlighting the significant ways in which skin tone, physical appearance, and stereotypes about mixed-racial heritage shaped the lives of mixed-race women, this thesis will complicate understandings of race during the early twentieth century, and the notion of a homogenous black community. Divided into three main chapters, it will examine how the acquisition of phenotypical features of mixed-race became separated from the 'deviant' and marginal stereotype associated with mixed-heritage to symbolise, among other things, an engagement with American consumerism, as well as how the women who naturally embodied these features negotiated their appearance. It will then explore how mixed-race women themselves responded to stereotypes and articulated their lived experience; and finally investigate the lives of two biracial women born to a white mother and a black father.

The histories of racial binaries in the United States, whereby people classified as either 'black' or 'white,' was gradually codified throughout the colonial era, through the early nineteenth century, antebellum era, and Civil War. Laws regulating the sexual affairs of those

living in the American colonies in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century – dictating entitlement to marry and reproduce based on distinctions of race – were integral to the development of a racially defined America in the post-revolutionary period, where legally and culturally one was subject to a racial designation of either 'black or 'white.' Following the abolition of slavery via the thirteenth Amendment in 1865 and the development of civil rights for African Americans through the earlier part of Reconstruction, the ruling white elites of the United States arguably felt that their fragile grip on power was at risk. They required a more substantial system to shore up ideas about racial supremacy and inferiority, and white power and privilege. By the late 1870s, then, the United States was subject to both *de jure* "separate but equal" and *de facto* racial segregation. Systematically dividing the country into a binary of racial designation, it was regulated by a legal principle known as the 'one-drop rule.'[1] According to such legislation, 'one-drop' of 'black blood' classified an individual 'Negro;' a phenomenon that African-American educator Booker T. Washington encapsulated in his statement that: "if a person is known to have one percent of African blood in his veins, he ceases to be a white man. The ninety-nine percent of Caucasian blood does not weigh by the side of the one percent of African blood… The person is a Negro every time."[2] Also known as the 'one ancestor rule,' the 'traceable amount rule,' and the 'hypo-descent rule,' this decree was unique to the starkly-racialised social structure of America, as no other nation displayed the same anxiety about racial ambiguity.[3] While colloquial classifications did exist for people of mixed-racial heritage within the United States, there has never been a consistently-enforced official category. Terminology created to represent 'blood quantum' included 'mulatto' to denote a person of African-American and white descent, while 'quadroon' signified the child of 'mulatto' and white parentage, and 'octoroon' the offspring of a 'quadroon' and white person.[4] Etymologically speaking, 'mulatta' is the female form of

[1] An important aspect of this regulation was that it primarily applied to people of mixed African-European descent, and not to other patterns of 'racial intermixture.' Winthrop D. Jordan, 'Historical Origins of the One-Drop Racial Rule in the United States,' edited by Paul Spickard, *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies*, Volume 1, No. 1, (2014) p.101

[2] Booker T. Washington, *The Future of the American Negro*, (Boston, Maynard and Co., 1900) p.158

[3] F. James Davis, *Who is Black? One Nation's Definition*, (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001) p.5; and Jordan, 'Historical Origins of the One-Drop Racial Rule in the United States,' p.10; In Brazil for instance, racially ambiguous people of mixed-race descent were referred to as 'branquinha' meaning 'whitish,' while in Jamaica mixed-race individuals that could pass for white were often designated 'Jamaica white.' Brazil in particular has a kaleidoscope of skin colour designations, including "alva (pure white), alva-rosada (white with pink highlights), melada (honey-coloured), canela (cinnamon), preta (black), and pouco clara (not very clear)." Allyson Hobbs, *A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life*, (Harvard University Press, 2014) pp.22-23

[4] Edward Byron Reuter, *The Mulatto in the United States: Including a Study of the Role of Mixed-Blood Races Throughout the World*, (Boston, The Gorham Press, 1918) p.13

the word 'mulatto,' and was used to describe women of African-American and white descent.[5] However, the term 'mulatto' was often used by contemporaries as a blanket-term for mixed-race people of both genders in popular discourse, legislative classifications and scientific research.

Occupying a liminal space between racial designations, the historical experience of mixed-race American women offers a valuable insight into how notions of race, gender, class, and even physical aesthetics were understood, articulated and negotiated throughout the United States. The formal homogenisation of Americans of African-descent, regardless of racial background or 'blood quantum,' by late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century contemporaries, and subsequently by present-day historians, however, fails to account for the differing ways that skin tone and racial heritage influenced the lived experience, identity construction, and complex racial politics endured by mixed-race women of black and white parentage.[6] That said, it is impossible to begin any history of black-white mixed-race women without recognising the significance of black women's history throughout this period.

Following centuries of misrepresentation which cast African-American women as immoral, bestial and 'monstrous,' black women worked to counter the defeminising myth of black womanhood by adhering to what came to be known as the 'politics of respectability.'[7] Coined by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham in her study of black Baptist clubwomen, and often portrayed in ecclesiastical terms, the phrase is best articulated by activist Anna Julia Cooper who claimed in 1892 that black women were deemed "the fundamental agency under God in the regeneration…of the race."[8] The urban migration of black Americans from southern

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[5] While the focus of this research is concerned with the 'mulatta,' it will follow the methodological approach of Eve Allegra Raimon who alternated between the masculine and feminine forms of the noun to acknowledge the universalised etymologically-masculine phrase 'mulatto.' This thesis will therefore employ the masculine form when alluding to the literary tradition and other contemporaneous uses, and the feminine form when discussing a particular instance of the trope. Eve Allegra Raimon, *The Tragic Mulatta Revisited: Race and Nationalism in the Nineteenth-Century Antislavery Fiction*, (New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 2004) p.7

[6] Such homogenisation of mixed-race women has resulted in the experience of mixed-race women being marginalised in the historical record. It has been well documented that the historical voices of African-American women are replete with silences, and as mixed-race women were, and continue to be, homogenised into that of African-Americans broadly, their unique experience of race in the U.S. is further concealed.

[7] For an account of the ways in which African-Americans have been portrayed by early white authors, please see: Jennifer L. Morgan, '"Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder:" Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770,' *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol.54, No.1 (1997) pp.167-192; and Crystal N. Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching*, (Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2009), p.164

[8] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, (Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1997); and Anna Julia Cooper, *Voice of the South*, (Ohio, 1892) p.28. The significance of black womanhood to the African-American race began during the seventeenth- through to the nineteenth-century, when most Southern states adopted the principle of *partus sequitur ventrem* which tied an individual's social and racial identity to the condition of their mother. In 1662, Virginia enacted

states to cities in the North such as Chicago and New York over the course of the early twentieth century generated a series of 'moral panics.'[9] In particular, the perception that newly-arrived black female migrants were at risk of falling into salacious and immoral behaviour became a preoccupation of black organisations and the black middle class, who deemed such eventualities as a threat to the progress of the race. The middle-class enforcement of the 'politics of respectability' therefore became a way to manage and negotiate class distinctions within urban black communities, by seeking to control the movements and behaviour of the emerging urban black working class.[10] Historian Hazel Carby agrees that the 1920s were characterised by an ideological, political, and cultural contestation between the black bourgeoisie and an emerging urban black working class, which manifested in the policing of the black female body within urban landscapes.[11] As black women were portrayed as African Americans' moral standard-bearers, and therefore responsible for racial progress, black women not only formed the focus of such targeted control, but were often at the forefront of policing the actions of other black women.[12]

However, only women of high moral and class standing were deemed capable of tackling the immorality of others. W.E.B. Du Bois argued that "the pure and noble-minded women" were needed "to fight an army of devils that disgraces our manhood and womanhood."[13] Leading by example, organisations such as the Phillis Wheatley Association were set up by 'respectable' black women to house unmarried black women who had recently migrated to the city, and to teach vocational skills such as domestic service. Within the care of such organisations, these black women were warned about the dangers of disreputable company, and were told to avoid places such as brothels, dance halls and nightclubs where 'unsavoury' characters would frequent. Women such as prostitutes were not viewed as suitable company. Yet, as Saidiya Hartman argues in her most recent work, there were many black women in urban centres who refused these ideas of what counted as respectability among middle class black women. These women lived what members of black women's

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this principle, establishing that "all children borne in this country shall be held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother." Quoted in: V. Lynn Kennedy, *Born Southern: Childbirth, Motherhood, and Social Networks in the Old South*, (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010) p.160. Post-emancipation, the role of black women evolved to one that aimed to counter derogatory stereotypes.

[9] Hazel Carby, 'Policing the Black Woman's Body in an Urban Context,' *Critical Inquiry*, 18 (1992) p.739

[10] Jane Rhodes, 'Pedagogies of Respectability: Race, Media, and Black Womanhood in the Early 20th Century,' *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture & Society*, vol. 18, no. 2-4 (2016) p.202; and Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, The Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2007) pp.28-29

[11] Carby, 'Policing the Black Woman's Body in an Urban Context,' p.754

[12] Rhodes, 'Pedagogies of Respectability,' (2016) p.203

[13] W.E.B. Du Bois, as quoted in Rhodes, 'Pedagogies of Respectability,' p.205

clubs would have deemed 'wayward lives,' but they, themselves were determined to define their own ideals of liberty through freedom of expression, free love, and queer identities.[14]

As a conceptual framework, Higginbotham's 'politics of respectability' goes some way to elucidate the ways in which black women sought to counter racist representations, navigate a hostile public sphere and to minimise the bodily harm inflicted upon black women during the early twentieth century. However, in recent years, scholars have sought to complicate this narrative. Jane Rhodes has shown that black newspapers and journals such as the *Amsterdam News*, *The Crisis* and the *Messenge*r were cultural sites which constructed and disseminated messages promoting the importance of respectability to uplift the race.[15] While many of the pieces within these publications took a tone of moral condescension towards their target audience of newly-arrived black working-class women, some members of the educated black elite, such as Alice Dunbar Nelson in her weekly *Pittsburgh Courier* column, sought to undermine notions of respectability by advocating for black women's advancement rather than issuing patronising cautions.[16] Furthermore, historian Brittney C. Cooper has shown that while many black women were concerned with the task of making the race 'respectable,' it was not the only strategy employed in their service to racial uplift. In particular, Cooper examines the work and experiences of individuals such as Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell and Fannie Barrier Williams, to show that black women across the period were not only institution builders and activists who built schools, lodging houses and churches, but they also made a significant contribution as public thinkers and as black female intellectuals.[17] Moving beyond a sole focus on respectability discourse, Cooper argues that organisations such as the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) should be viewed as a key intellectual site in which race women theorised notions of both gender and sexuality.[18]

Moreover, a key part of Cooper's work which holds particular relevance for this research, comes in the form of her theory of "embodied discourse." This theory contends that the experiences of black women occur because of and on their bodies, meaning that race and gender are literally embodied. As the black female body is subject to a variety of violations,

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[14] Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval,* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019)
[15] Rhodes, 'Pedagogies of Respectability,' pp.202-203
[16] Rhodes, 'Pedagogies of Respectability,' p.208
[17] Brittney C. Cooper*, Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017) p.11 and p.23
[18] *Ibid.,* p.21

including silence and submission in the name of respectability, Cooper shows that black female intellectuals located black women's bodies at the centre of their texts.[19] Centring black women's bodies served a number of purposes, beyond indexing pain and trauma. Indeed, by depicting bodies in search of pleasure highlighted that black women also had a right to joy.[20] By complicating Higginbotham's 'politics of respectability' framework, Cooper shows that black women negotiated a balance between adherence to middle-class societal expectations, and the need for public acknowledgement of intersectionality.

As activists sought to redefine the image of African-Americans, through the policing of black female bodies and by contributing to black intellectual discourse, the physical representation of racial uplift often existed in the form of a light-skinned 'New Negro' woman. While it can be argued that the mixed-race female body was used to inform 'New Negro' iconographies, this thesis will more clearly elucidate the ways in which the position of mixed-race women was contested during the early-twentieth century, and voice the experiences of the light-skinned women so often historically-homogenised into the African-American community.[21]

Contending with a biracial-system of hierarchy and the 'politics of respectability,' mixed-race Americans, but women in particular, often inhabited tenuous ground, set apart from both black and white communities in a middle-ground of racial identity. This research will therefore address this contested 'middle-ground' to determine how mixed-race women were perceived across the black-white colour line throughout the U.S., examining not only intra-racial prejudice within the black community and white racism, but also how mixed-race women themselves articulated their position in American society.[22] The turn of the twentieth century was replete with contradictory stereotypes which painted mixed-race women as 'blue vein' conceited elitists proud of their white-European heritage; 'tragic' and 'marginal mulattas' unable to cope with their conflicting genes; and overtly-sexualised, mixed-race 'Jezebels.' This thesis will more thoroughly interrogate the symbolic iconographies, sociological assertions and creative contentions that held a persistent presence in the early-

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[19] *Ibid.,* pp.40-41

[20] *Ibid.,* pp.74-75

[21] Indeed, Cherene Sherrard-Johnson argues that common imaginings of light-skinned and mixed-race female bodies were intrinsically bound to visual narratives of the 1920s. Cherene Sherrard-Johnson, '"A Plea for Color:" Nella Larsen's Iconography of the Mulatta,' *American Literature*, Vol.76, No.4, (2004) p.836.

[22] In order to more thoroughly elucidate the ways in which the position of mixed-race women was contested, this thesis will use a variety of research methods and consult a range of source material such as memoirs, letters, novels, photographs and legislation.

twentieth century, to determine what mixed-racial heritage physically, legally, and emotionally embodied for women of black-white descent. Moreover, it will complicate the ways in which racial identity is understood in the U.S. by considering how signifiers such as behaviour, class, personal acquaintance, skin tone, and racial heritage made an individual 'authentically black,' as well as what circumstances denied such a classification.

Focus will be narrowed to the late nineteenth- early twentieth-century because this period not only marked a fascination with the mixed-race mind, body, and morality in the American imagination, arguably unmatched until the turn of the twenty-first century; but also bore witness to a series of racial turmoil. Following the abolition of slavery in 1865, white hegemony required new ways to enforce ideas about African-American inferiority. The Age of Enlightenment, which witnessed science challenge religion as a moral and intellectual guiding force, lead to the rise of new scientific fields throughout the nineteenth century. Over the course of eighty years, from 1870 to 1950, the United States witnessed the emergence of eugenics as a field of scientific enquiry; the rise of not one but two iterations of the Ku Klux Klan; the implementation of xenophobic immigration restriction; two World Wars; the development of Garveyism; and the dawn of what would come to be known as the Harlem Renaissance. Amidst all of this, the category 'mulatto' was removed as a legal racial designation from official census records. This thesis will therefore explore how the women occupying a contested corporality navigated their identity during the racially tumultuous, early-twentieth century.

Research Context

This research will interrogate, actively engage with, and contribute to the field of Critical Mixed-Race Studies (hereafter CMRS.) This discipline first appeared in the late-1980s and early-1990s when numerous unpublished dissertations addressed the topic of multiraciality. Jayne Ifekwunigwe's seminal book '*Mixed Race' Studies: A Reader* (2004), provided one of the first comprehensive investigations of CMRS, by exploring the concepts and theories surrounding the study of mixed-racial heritage.[23] By 2010 with the inaugural 'Critical Mixed Race Studies Conference' and launch of the *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies in 2011,*

[23] Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe, (ed.) '*Mixed Race' Studies: A Reader*, (London, Routledge, 2004)

this interdisciplinary field became recognised as the study of multiracial identities and mixed-race experiences in the United States.[24]

Mapping the paradigms of this emerging field, G. Reginald Daniel, Laura Kina, Wei Ming Dariotis and Camilla Fojas have not only explored the history of mixed-race studies and posited the methodological directions that it could take in future research, but have also warned that more thorough archival research must be conducted to more accurately reflect CMRS' historical roots.[25] Responding to these suggestions, this thesis will provide an interdisciplinary, but nonetheless rigorously-historical, contribution to CMRS. In particular, it will consider the representation of mixed-race women across various American narratives such as novels, plays and advertising, while also employing a range of primary source material such as diaries, letters, newspaper articles, census records, and anti-miscegenation legislation to ascertain how mixed-racial identity was understood – both by the women themselves and by larger society – during the early-twentieth century. This research will not be the first to present an historical analysis of mixed-race Americans within the conceptual and methodological framework of CMRS, but it will develop previous works by interrogating a wider range of sources and addressing broader issues.[26] In particular, it will situate the voices of mixed-race women within their historical and theoretical context, and consider the ways in which mixed-racial heritage was creatively explored and privately considered by mixed-race women. It will speak to the work of CMRS theorists such as Rainier Spencer, who surveyed the novels of Jessie Fauset, Nella Larsen, Charles Chesnutt and James Weldon Johnson to ascertain the extent to which mixed-race Americans responded to the stereotypes crafted by sociologists such as Robert E. Park, Edward Reuter and Everett Stonequist.[27] Finding no evidence of 'tragic' or marginal characters in the works of these authors', Spencer surmises that the sociological notion of marginality had no bearing on their lived experiences of racial mixture, to the extent that they did not even deem it a credible plot device. Recognising instead the sophisticated evaluations of racial mixture produced by Fauset,

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[24] For information on the Critical Mixed Race Studies community, please see: http://criticalmixedracestudies.org The *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies* was launched in 2011, but its inaugural publication came in 2014: *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies*, Volume 1, No.1 (2014)

[25] G. Reginald Daniel, Laura Kina, Wei Ming Dariotis and Camilla Fojas, 'Emerging Paradigms in Critical Mixed Race Studies,' *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies*, Volume 1, No.1 (2014) pp.6-65; and p.30

[26] Scholars who have previously presented an historical analysis of mixed-race Americans include: Rainier Spencer, *Reproducing Race: The Paradox of Generation Mix* (Lynne Rienner, Colorado, 2011), G. Reginald Daniel, *More than Black: Multiracial Identity and the New Racial Order,* (Temple Univeristy Press, Philadelphia, 2001); and Hobbs, *A Chosen Exile.*

[27] Spencer, *Reproducing Race* pp.35-74

Larsen, Chesnutt and Johnson, Spencer concludes that the mixed-race ‘marginal man’ existed only “in the minds of racist white men.”[28]

However, this thesis will recognise that some African-American and mixed-race writers did in fact create psychologically-unstable ‘high yaller’ characters and engage with the ‘marginal man’ stereotype.[29] It will therefore build on Spencer’s work by integrating alternative forms of creative media and autobiographical material such as memoirs, letters and oral history testimony, to provide a more thorough picture of how mixed-race women responded to, and engaged with, stereotypes surrounding mixed-racial identity. It will consider the dramatic play scripts authored by mixed-race women, and reflect upon the ways in which some mixed-race authors articulated their concerns in the public sphere. As dramatic scripts could be physically performed, the plays provided a powerful way for them to articulate their thoughts concerning how notions of colour and physicality impacted the lived experience of mixed-race women.[30] This thesis will expand on Koritha Mitchell’s work by examining the autobiographical works of mixed-race female writers alongside the drama they published. Building on this analysis, the personal testimony and autobiographical materials of mixed-race women outside of the public eye will be examined to ascertain the lived experience for mixed-race Americans of black-white descent, physically, legally, and psychologically during the opening decades of the twentieth century.[31] This interdisciplinary approach will result in a comprehensive understanding of how mixed-racial identity was defined, explored and negotiated by mixed-race women, which goes beyond existing analyses limited to one disciplinary field.

Another contribution to the field of CMRS that this thesis will provide, is a further interrogation of the aesthetics of racialised beauty articulated by contemporaries, and the influence such rhetoric had on mixed-race women during the early-twentieth century. The skin bleaching industry has been explored by historians such as Jacob Dorman and Kathy Peiss, but their analyses of the African-American community do not consider the effect that discourses surrounding skin hue had on mixed-race individuals, whose light skin signified

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[28] *Ibid.,* pp.67-69
[29] *Ibid.*
[30] In a similar vein, historian Koritha Mitchell has analysed lynching plays authored by mixed-race writers, highlighting the ways in which such works reflected the often contested relationships between blacks and whites within African-American communities. Mitchell, *Living with Lynching*, (Illinois, 2012)
[31] Methodologically, this will be inspired by *Miscegenation Blues* (1994), a contemporary anthology of poems, essays and anecdotes written by women of mixed-racial heritage that address issues of identity, corporeality, and exoticisation in the U.S. and Canada. *Miscegenation Blues: Voices of Mixed-Race Women*, edited by Carol Camper, (Sister Vision, Toronto, 1994)

both the violation of white-defined anti-miscegenation law and the African-American female body.[32] In particular, links have not been made between the way in which phenotypically mixed-race bodies, which Cherene Sherrard-Johnson argues were intrinsically bound to visual narratives of the 1920s, signified a new form of black womanhood that linked 'lightness' with social status.[33] It will be shown that the 1920s witnessed the conscious attempt by African-Americans of all shades and degrees of racial heritage to reconfigure an identity in-line with modern 'New Negro' aspirations to be 'light, bright, and attractive' through the use of whitening powders and skin bleaching creams. Despite a history in the U.S. of 'blue vein' mulatto elite societies and a common notion that white heritage 'refined' or 'improved' an individual with African heritage, it will be shown that the pursuit of lighter skin was not bound up in a desire to be 'genealogically' white Caucasian; nor allude to mixed black-white heritage. The methodological frameworks of sociologist Shirley Anne Tate, whose work contends that 'whiteness' is not at the centre of the beauty aspirations of black women in the U.S., the Caribbean and the U.K. today, will be employed within this analysis and applied to the historical context of 1920s America.[34] In particular, Tate critiques Sheila Jeffery's contention that black women want to be white, and that the beauty practices of black women demonstrate internalised racism.[35] Instead, Tate highlights that the beauty practices and embodiments popular within black communities "are given meaning and value within a Black aesthetic space and no other space is aimed for or desired."[36] These same arguments can be applied to the beauty rituals undertaken by African-American women during the early-twentieth century, whose desire to attain a light, golden-brown appearance demonstrated an engagement with racial uplift discourses, and an ability to take part in American modernity and consumerism.

A final example of the way in which this thesis will provide an original contribution to the field of CMRS and to Critical Race Theory, surrounds an interrogation of the fluidity of racial identification for mixed-race women and a recognition that, alongside legislative categories and physical characteristics, factors such as personal affiliation, behaviour and class shaped black- and white-defined notions of race. In 1993, historian Naomi Zack

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[32] Jacob S. Dorman, 'Skin Bleach and Civilisation: The Racial Formation of Blackness in 1920s Harlem,' *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol. 4, No.4 (2011) pp.47-80; and Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*, (New York, 1998)

[33] Cherene Sherrard-Johnson, *Portraits of the New Negro Woman: Visual and Literary Culture in the Harlem Renaissance*, (Rutgers University Press, 2007)

[34] Shirley Anne Tate, *Black Beauty: Aesthetics, Stylization, Politics*, (Routledge, 2009)

[35] *Ibid.*, pp.112-113

[36] *Ibid.,* p.112

responded to the argument that people of mixed-race have historically existed in a liminal space, by contending that individuals of black-white descent passively accepted their social and legal designation as 'Negro.'[37] However, Zack does not consider that the construction of racial identity for the, albeit smaller number of, mixed-race Americans born to white mothers, may have been more complicated than for those born to black mothers. Again responding to the work of Rainier Spencer, this thesis will not only address Zack's contention but also historicise a contemporary debate within the field of CMRS which interrogates the extent to which the white mothers of mixed-race Americans influence their children's racial identity construction.[38] When it is considered that under enslavement, the mixed-race child of a slave inherited the same status as their mother, and that under the 'one-drop rule' a person could only be classified as 'white' or 'Negro,' the final chapter of this thesis will investigate the experience of mixed-race women born to white mothers during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century.[39]

Research Methods

In *A Chosen Exile*, historian Allyson Hobbs used both literary and historical sources together to illuminate the lives of racially-ambiguous mixed-race Americans throughout the twentieth century.[40] This thesis will follow Hobbs' methodological approach by using literary texts alongside more conventional historical sources. In addition to these, however, the thesis will also employ visual materials such as photographs and artwork to provide a thorough and more extensive picture of the lived experience of mixed-race women. In a similar vein, historian Anne Elizabeth Carroll has argued that the literature produced by African-Americans during the Harlem Renaissance constitutes "only one aspect of the struggle for representation" during the 1920s, but that scholarly attention has tended to focus on separate elements of the Renaissance, such as literature, intellectual discourse, art, and advertising.[41] Renowned literary theorist Henry Louis Gates Jr. has explored the conscious reconstruction of the black image by African-American intellectuals and creatives.[42] While pointing out that

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[37] Naomi Zack, *Race and Mixed-Race*, (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1993) p.85
[38] Spencer, *Reproducing Race,* p.9; and pp.183-212
[39] Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Yale University Press, 1997); Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (1996); and Spencer, *Reproducing Race,* p.9; pp.183-212
[40] Hobbs, *A Chosen Exile,* pp.7-8
[41] Anne Elizabeth Carroll, *Word, Image, and the New Negro: Representation and Identity in the Harlem Renaissance*, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2007)
[42] Henry Louis Gates Jr., 'The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black,' *Representations*, No.24, (1988) pp.129-155

the caricaturing of African-American features such as lip size and nose shape throughout popular culture would imply a visual priority of concern, Gates contends that through a literary renaissance, the black 'voice' was deemed the method by which the 'face' of the race would be reconstructed. Although an important and highly-significant contribution to literary analysis, the value placed on the physical reconstruction of the African-American race should not be overlooked; nor the significance of visual texts created to address this reconstruction. In particular, this thesis will build on Gates' work to show that attributing the emphasis placed on crafting a 'New Negro' solely on a literary renaissance alone does not account for the effort made by African-American women to physically reconfigure their appearance through the use of skin bleaching creams. Indeed, the proliferation of skin bleach advertisements, which visually-commodified light skin, intersected with the popular 'New Negro' rhetoric of black intellectuals such as W.E.B. Du Bois, and the visual representations of this discourse. This thesis will therefore consider the ways in which many of the sources typically studied in isolation in order to examine mixed-race identity, in fact spoke to one another during the early-twentieth century. By recognising the various ways in which these seemingly detached elements informed one another, this work will piece together the history of a group of women often excluded from the historical record.

Primary Source Materials

The central methodological practice for this interdisciplinary thesis is extensive archival research. In addition to creative literature such as novels, plays, and poetry, primary source material including diaries, memoirs, letters, autobiographical essays, oral testimony, and visual imagery such as advertisements, are utilised throughout the thesis.

Primary research materials for this thesis were sourced at a number of archival institutions through a series of research trips. The Moorland-Spingarn Center at Howard University in Washington DC, for instance, holds the Georgia Douglas Johnson Papers. Containing personal papers, writings, and photographs reflecting Johnson's literary activities and involvement with the New Negro Renaissance in Washington, DC, this collection also houses correspondence with noteworthy individuals such as William Braithwaite, W.E.B. Du Bois, Zora Neale Hurston, Jessie Fauset, Bruce Nugent and Langston Hughes, Wallace Thurman and Jean Toomer, all of which provided an insight into Johnson's status among the black middle-class in DC. In addition, the collection contained surviving copies of Johnson's race poems and plays, many of which feature in rare publications or are unpublished, and

which proved integral to exposing how a woman with mixed-racial heritage creatively explored the history of interracial relationships in the United States. The Anita Thompson Dickerson Reynolds Collection is also held at Moorland-Spingarn and, in addition to correspondence files and audio interview tapes, contains draft materials related to Reynolds's recently discovered and published memoir *American Cocktail*. These items provided an interesting insight into how a racially-ambiguous woman of mixed-racial heritage, such as Anita Reynolds, viewed race in a global context. The final major collection of significance to this thesis at the Moorland-Spingarn Center, is the Angelina Weld Grimké Collection. This collection contains Angelina's correspondence with key family members throughout her childhood to adulthood and, when used in combination with her father's collection the Archibald H. Grimké Papers, painted a more thorough picture of Angelina's experience as a mixed-race woman born to a white mother at the turn of the century.

The second major archive from which this thesis gleaned its research, was the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, in New York City. Housed within this research library are the archives of two light-skinned, African-American sisters, namely the Fredi Washington Papers and the Isabel Washington Powell Collection.[43] As light-skinned actresses active during the 1920s and 1930s, these collections provided an insight into the rhetoric used by media outlets to describe women of mixed-race heritage in the public eye. In particular, references to the "extraordinary beauty of face and figure" said to bless these two women were a frequent focus of reporters. For instance, a marriage announcement in the *Chicago Defender* referred to Washington as the "Stage's Prettiest Star," while Washington Powell is repeatedly referred to as "dusky" throughout various newspapers while one article calls her a "Semitic-featured dusky beauty."[44] Such insights provided a useful context to Chapter One, which examines the multifaceted standards of beauty endorsed within African-American communities. Perhaps the largest collection examined within the Schomburg Center, however, was Schuyler Family Papers. Containing, among other things, the photographs, correspondence, diary extracts, published articles, and autobiographical writings of George, Josephine, and Philippa Schuyler, this collection was integral to the final chapter on the experience of mixed-race women born to white mothers.

[43] Fredi Washington Papers, 1922-1981, (microform) Sc Micro R-5002. Schomburg Centre for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, New York; and Isabel Washington Powell Collection, Sc MG163. Schomburg Centre for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, New York

[44] *Chicago Defender* Saturday August 19, 1933. Fredi Washington Papers, Reel 1, Box 1; and Isabel Washington Powell Collection.

Using autobiographical writings as historical sources is valuable in several ways. Traditionally, autobiographies were largely considered an accurate source of factual information, and although their authenticity was eventually drawn into question, the 1960s marked a recognition that while not always factually correct, what autobiographical writers choose to reveal exposes how certain life experiences were interpreted within particular society and cultural contexts. [45] Therefore, while some of the recollections detailed in the autobiographical works examined throughout this thesis could be considered faulty or selective, they nonetheless highlight the way in which these women understood their social and cultural environment. Michel Foucault has argued that autobiographies should not be interpreted in terms of what they reveal about the author, but rather what societal discourses have led to the emergence of that particular mind-set.[46] If Foucault's theory is followed assiduously however, the inevitable conclusion is that these playwrights had no sense of individual agency.[47] Instead, their decision to produce creative works with autobiographical elements, reveals a conscious decision to write themselves, and mixed-race women, into existence suggesting a considerable amount of agency.

This observation taps into a longer trajectory of elucidating the myriad of ways that women's autobiography, and in particular those penned by black women, have been overlooked by theorists of autobiography. Within the field of autobiographical theory, the practice of writing about one's self has generally focussed on that of white Western male authors. In more recent years, feminist theorists have undertaken the task of studying the autobiographical writings of women across different races, classes, and cultural settings, to reveal new theoretical frameworks. Collating seventeen articles which explore the contribution women have made to autobiography, *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography,* is deemed by its editors Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck as the "collective restoration" of silenced women's voices to autobiography theory and criticism.[48] Examining the previously overlooked nuances of black women's autobiography for instance, reveals that the practice of writing about one's self as a black women in America, evolved in a myriad of ways over the course of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century.

[45] Dave Carlson, 'Autobiography' in Miriam Dobson, and Benjamin Ziemann (eds.), *Reading Primary Sources: The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth-and Twentieth-Century History,* (London, 2008) pp.176-177
[46] Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in Donald Bouchard (ed.) *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays & Interviews by Michel Foucault* (1977) pp.113-138; and Carlson,'Autobiography,' pp.178-182
[47] Carlson, 'Autobiography,' pp.181-182
[48] Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, 'Introduction,' *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography*, edited by Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) p.13

In the United States, the print origins of black women's literature, and indeed, black women's autobiography, were slave narratives.[49] Formerly enslaved men such as Olaudah Equiano and Frederick Douglass are well-known for their popular autobiographies, which were written with the intention to persuade readers to support the abolition movement. Black women, too, such as Harriet Jacob, charted their life experiences under enslavement. In order to avoid criticism, black men and black women had to exercise caution when recounting particular aspects of their experience under enslavement by appearing as objective as possible, not displaying emotions such as anger or outrage, and not insulting the reader's intelligence or moral standing.[50] In order to make their narratives as palatable as possible to white readers, the details of any violent or unpleasant experiences were simply 'forgotten,' and therefore masked in a veil of silence.[51] While the necessity of this strategy was a reality for both black men and black women, who were not only dependent on white patronage but also attempting to placate criticism, Jocelyn Moody has identified that nineteenth-century black women autobiographers employed the additional rhetorical strategy of self-effacement.[52] Although the autobiographical narratives of these women differ in a number of ways, Moody shows that over the course of the nineteenth century black men did not display the same level of self-effacement as black women. Historian Nellie Y. Mckay agrees that in spite of their common racial experience, black women's slave narratives differed in content and emphasis from those of black men. For instance, women who escaped from slavery stressed the significance of family ties and a supportive community, crediting the efforts of others for their journey to freedom and good fortune. Within the autobiographies of black men, however, authors tended to take credit for their individual initiative and bravery.[53] Black women's status as "twice other," as a result of their race and gender, underscores that black women were compelled to adopt deliberately subversive depictions of black American female lives, which adhered to the parameters of the nineteenth century Cult of True Womanhood.[54] While it is true that black women suffered the double oppression of race and gender, it is also important to recognise that the experience of being black and female in the United States

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[49] Toni Morrison, 'The Site of Memory,' in *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, edited by William K. Zinsser, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987:1998) p.185

[50] *Ibid.,* p.187

[51] *Ibid.,* pp.190-191

[52] Jocelyn Moody, 'Twice Other, Once Shy: Nineteenth-Century Black Women Autobiographers and the American Literary Tradition of Effacement,' *Auto/Biography Studies*, Vol. 7, no. 1 (Spring 1992) p.46

[53] Nellie Y. McKay, 'Race, Gender, and Cultural Context in Zora Neale Hurston's Dust Tracks on a Road,' in *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography*, edited by Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) p.177

[54] Moody, 'Twice Other, Once Shy,' p.49 and p.59

varied across different environments and generations, and therefore so did the strategies employed by black female autobiographers.[55]

In a practice that Teresa Zackodnik has termed 'talking out both sides of their mouths,' twentieth century writers tapped into the rhetorical technique of nineteenth century black abolitionists and similarly engaged in a double-voiced discourse, which was mindful of offending white patrons, but still offered a veiled critique of contemporary racial and patriarchal subjugation.[56] It will be shown later in this thesis that while at face value in her text, *Dust Tracks on a Road,* Zora Neale Hurston deviated from earlier forms of black autobiography which were focussed on racial uplift, upon closer inspection she actually used her own strategy to subtly undermine some of the societal restrictions imposed upon both African-Americans and women. In particular, Hurston's curation of five appendix-style chapters, which sit outside of the chronology of her life, can be interpreted as a critical response to nineteenth-century slave narratives which often contained appended documents by highly respected individuals to guarantee the authenticity the narrative. Harriet Jacobs's 1861 autobiographical novel *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, for instance, contained an introduction from her white editor, and two supporting statements in the appendix from a white abolitionist and a "highly respectable colored" man.[57] By writing her own appendices, Hurston not only gave a nod to the continued racial and patriarchal oppressions faced by women, but also made a stand to assert that a black female writer is more than capable of validating her own authenticity.[58]

Celeste Henery has contended that black women's writing contributes to a collective dialogue, and can be viewed as a "practice of diaspora."[59] As Hurston chose to tap into the historic experience of nineteenth century black female autobiographers, albeit in her own unique form of veiled critique, it can nonetheless be argued that she contributed to this collective tradition of black women's autobiography. In addition, Alice Dunbar-Nelson also contributes to this collective dialogue in a number of ways, such as through her departure from the traditional self-effacement employed by nineteenth century black women writers.

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[55] McKay, 'Race, Gender, and Cultural Context in Zora Neale Hurston's Dust Tracks on a Road,' pp.176-177

[56] Zackodnik, *The Mulatta and the Politics of Race*, p.199, note.5; Foreman, 'Looking Back from Zora,' pp.649-666

[57] Linda Brent (Harriet Ann Jacobs), *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*, edited by L. Maria Child (Boston: 1861; Electronic Edition: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2003) pp.304-306

[58] Walker, 'Zora Neale Hurston and the Post-Modern Self in Dust Tracks on a Road,' p.390

[59] Celeste Henery, 'And So I write You: Practices in Black Women's Diaspora,' *Meridians*, Vol. 15, No.2, (2017) p.437

The sentiments expressed throughout Dunbar-Nelson's autobiographical essay 'Brass Ankles,' for instance, highlight the varying ways in which she experienced and negotiated the realities of mixed-race ancestry across the United States.[60] Although the essay was not published during her lifetime, it does not mean that Dunbar-Nelson did not intend for 'Brass Ankles' to one day be read by an unknown future audience. Indeed, through the essay it can be argued that she conveyed her story with the purpose of validating her thoughts, reactions, and experiences as a women of mixed-racial heritage within the context of the early-twentieth century. Composed in 1921 and then from 1926 to 1931, Dunbar-Nelson's diaries, which have since been edited and published by historian Gloria T. Hull, under the title: *Give Us Each Day: The Diary of Alice Dunbar-Nelson,* are written in a similar manner.[61] In particular, the visibly-edited passages and her explicit claim that "my diary is going to be a valuable thing one of these days," indicates an intention to write for an indeterminate and imagined audience.[62] Historian Gloria Hull has also noted that throughout the diary, Dunbar-Nelson awkwardly twists sentences to interpolate phrases such as: "with me," "as did by me," and "as I knew."[63] These formulations may indicate a need to accord herself the credit not ordinarily received in public, as she often revealed that she felt a lack of appreciation. This need for appreciation suggests that as she recorded her everyday life, she did so with the intention that an audience would one day recognise her value. In a move away from the self-effacement strategy employed by black women over the course of the nineteenth century, which credited community efforts over those of the individual, Dunbar-Nelson's approach emphasises yet another way in which the practice of writing about one's self as a black woman evolved in a myriad of ways over the course of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century.

As stated above, this thesis will examine the autobiographical works of mixed-race female writers alongside their creative literature such as novels, plays, and poetry. However, it is worth noting that the distinction between these texts is not always easy to define. In particular, autobiographical elements can be found throughout the work of several women examined within this thesis. Dunbar-Nelson integrated autobiographical elements throughout

[60] Alice Dunbar-Nelson, 'Brass Ankles Speaks,' in Gloria T. Hull's (ed.) *The Works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*, Volume 2, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) pp.311-321
[61] Gloria T. Hull (ed.), *Give Us Each Day: The Diary of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*, (W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1984)
[62] Kristina Brooks, 'Between Love and Hate, Black and White: Narcissism and Double-Consciousness in the Diaries of Alice Dunbar-Nelson,' *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, Volume. 17, No. 1, (2001) p.104
[63] Hull (ed.), *Give Us Each Day: The Diary of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*, pp.31-32

the body of her fictional texts. When her autobiographical essay 'Brass Ankles' is read alongside her short story 'The Stones of the Village,' for instance, several similarities can be drawn between her own childhood experiences and those she crafts for her fictional protagonist Victor.[64] 'The Stones of the Village' can be described as a 'passing' story, as the story centres on Victor's decision to 'pass' as white. While Dunbar-Nelson's own life experiences arguably mirror those of Victor, it is significant that she cast a male protagonist rather than female. This strategy may have been to obscure identification with her own biography. Alternatively, as many 'passing' stories of the period featured female protagonists, leading to the practice being associated with black women abandoning their moral responsibilities to the race, Dunbar-Nelson could have made the conscious decision to disrupt black patriarchal critique of black women's decision to 'pass' by crafting a story that black men could identify with.

In her examination of Frances E.W. Harper's 1888-1889 serialised novel *Trial and Triumph, A Novel,* Nazera Saqiq Wright makes a similar observation that Harper drew on her life experiences as raw material to create a new form of fiction, which served as a valuable piece of racial uplift literature for the black community.[65] Through *Trial and Triumph,* Wright argues that Harper offered a "conduct manual" for young black girls at the end of the nineteenth century, which advised how to nurture and prepare them for a life committed to the progress of their race. The last few lines of the novel appear to confirm Wright's interpretation, as Harper speaks directly to the reader: "under the guise of fiction, I have essayed to weave a story which I hope with subserve a deeper purpose than the mere amusement of the hour, that it will quicken and invigorate human hearts and not fail to impart a lesson of usefulness and value."[66] Wright claims that in Harper's hands, the autobiographical becomes "a map for the future in a moment in black history when it was possible to peer down the road and see reason for hope," and that Harper therefore used her own experiences to assist young black girls of the late-1880s to shape a better future for themselves.[67] While this research does not have the scope to examine Harper's work more

[64] Alice Dunbar, 'The Stones of the Village,' in Gloria T. Hull's (ed.) *The Works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*, Volume 3, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1988) p.8; and Dunbar-Nelson, 'Brass Ankles Speaks,' pp.317-318

[65] Nazera Saqiq Wright, *Black Girlhood in the Nineteenth Century*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016) p.120

[66] *Ibid.,* p.145

[67] *Ibid.,* p.145

fully, Wright's analysis of *Trial and Triumph* nonetheless serves as a means to evidence the ways that black women have contributed to a long tradition of autobiography.

This thesis will also show that Angelina Weld Grimke's work often focussed on the theme of motherhood, which has led many scholars to draw links between the maternal abandonment Grimké experienced during her childhood, and the literature she produced. Her 1920 lynching play *Rachel*, sees the title character vow never to become a mother, after learning over the course of the play that, not only had her father and brother been lynched more than a decade ago, but that violent racial discrimination continued to effect innocent young children.[68] While Grimké herself claimed that her work was intended to encourage white women to join the anti-lynching movement, literary scholar Judith Stephens adds that Grimké critiques the period's notion of idealised motherhood, by questioning the desirability of black women to become mothers when so many sons, daughters, fathers, brothers, and sisters were being lynched throughout the period.[69]

Within the examples given above, it can be argued that, in the form of advice or critique, each writer used their own experiences to craft accessible stories which intentionally contributed to the uplift and progress of their race. It is useful to examine autobiographical texts alongside seemingly fictional work, even when links between the author's life and their creative work are less obvious. Indeed, renowned novelist Toni Morrison points out, that writers arrive at a text in many ways, and that "no matter how 'fictional' the account of these writers, or how much it was the product of invention, the act of imagination is bound up with memory."[70] Therefore, even when a writer believes that they are crafting a work of fiction, their memory and experiences inevitably shape their imagination and their creative work. When exploring the lived experienced of mixed-race or black women, as this thesis does, it is therefore valuable to examine autobiographical texts alongside seemingly fictional work to consider the ways in which personal experiences or societal critiques could be veiled "under the guise of fiction."

Oral history testimony, including digitised transcripts, are also employed throughout this thesis. One such collection includes the *Black Women Oral History Project* transcripts of interviews undertaken between 1976 and 1981, published online by the Schlesinger Library

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[68] Grimké, *Rachel*, pp.93-95
[69] *Ibid.* pp.333-334
[70] Morrison, 'The Site of Memory,' p.198

at the Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.[71] The narratives contained within this collection reveal the ways in which the oral histories conducted during the 1970s and 1980s can shed light on the lived experience of mixed-race women who were young adults or children during the early-twentieth century, and will provide valuable evidence throughout this research. In addition, the interviews collected by the Work Progress Administration's (WPA) Federal Writers Project in 1937 also form an important primary source throughout this research. In particular, these oral history narratives are used to expose the ways in which perceptions of skin tone, physical appearance and stereotypes about mixed-racial heritage shaped the lives of mixed-race women. As the interviewees were children in the years immediately prior to Emancipation, they witnessed the racial tension and discourses characteristic of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, and as such their testimony can reveal significant insight into understandings of racial identity; the lived experience of members of the African-American, regardless of shade; and perceptions of mixed-race Americans during this time. However, the efficacy of such sources must also be addressed.

Although the WPA narratives give voice to the experiences of mixed-race and African-American people, historian Melvina Johnson Young has argued that they were subject to the relationship dynamics of the ex-slave and interviewer.[72] Specifically, Young contends that honest discourse within WPA interviews would have been impossible due to the unspoken codes of behaviour that dictated how African-Americans should speak in the presence of white people.[73] It would therefore have been "extremely unwise to indict any white people…in front of other white people by attesting that slavery had been harsh and white people had been cruel."[74] Instead, Young argues that the narratives featured carefully-worded anecdotes fashioned to satisfy a white audience. Considering that between 1880 and 1930 over 3000 African-Americans were lynched by whites, it is understandable why interviewees may have feared violent repercussions.[75] Perceived threat to economic circumstance may also have affected discourse as many interviewees were not only dependent on government pensions, but under the impression that WPA interviewers could

[71] *Black Women Oral History Project*, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. http://guides.library.harvard.edu/schlesinger_bwohp
[72] Melvina Johnson Young, 'Exploring the WPA Narratives: Finding the Voices of Black Women and Men,' in Stanlie M. James and Abena P.A Busia's (eds.) *Theorising Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women*, (London: Routledge, 1993) p.57
[73] *Ibid.*
[74] *Ibid.,* pp.57-59
[75] Kristofer Allerfeldt, *Crime and the Rise of Modern America: A History from 1865-1941*, (New York, Routledge, 2011) p.47

influence their income.[76] Moreover, Young claims that the race, gender and class of the interviewer would have affected the narrative as: "in 1937, white men still held political, economic and sexual dominance over African-American women and men."[77] In addition, while black and white women may have shared gendered commonalities, racial politics and deeply-engrained stereotypes about black female promiscuity would have hindered communication with white female interviewers.[78] In contrast, Young maintains that the interviews conducted by African-Americans appeared more open, and contained more discussion about black-white relations.[79]

It must also be considered that as the narratives were collected during the 1930s, the memories and perceptions of the interviewees may have been influenced by the passing of time. Anecdotes about the preferential treatment awarded to lighter-skinned slaves, or particular disdain towards people of mixed-race heritage may well have been influenced by negative representations of mixed-race Americans in popular culture, science, sociology, and literature at the turn of the century and over the course of the 1910s and 1920s. Throughout this period, stereotypes which cast mixed-race women as 'blue vein' elitists, 'tragic mulattas' and debauched Jezebels, intersected with anti-miscegenation laws which attached a legal taboo to the offspring of interracial unions, and sociological contentions that mixed-race women in particular were psychologically unstable 'hybrids.' It is therefore possible to speculate that as scientific, legal and creative articulations of mixed-race women evolved over the course of the early twentieth century, so too did the recollections of the WPA interviewees who lived throughout this transformation.

Directly countering Young's critique above, however, historian Edward Baptist argues that while the race or gender difference between interviewer and interviewee may suggest an inability to speak freely, some of the narratives were in fact directly confrontational. Citing old age as a key factor in the ability to speak truth to power, Baptist quotes the testimony of Jack Maddox to highlight that moral courage peaked in the later years of the formerly enslaved who no longer had anything to lose: "I'd say these things now. I'd say them anywhere – in the courthouse – before the judges, before God. 'Cause they done all

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[76] Young, 'Exploring the WPA Narratives,' p.61
[77] *Ibid.,* p.62
[78] *Ibid.*, p.64
[79] *Ibid.*, pp.66-67

they could do to me."[80] In addition, Baptist also addresses the perceived drawback of faded memories and potential alterations through the intergenerational retelling of stories by highlighting the incredible similarity in the everyday tropes used by formerly enslaved to make sense of their lives, in States as disparate as Texas and Virginia. With that in mind, Baptist therefore argues that despite their perceived flaws, the vernacular histories present throughout the WPA narratives offer a valuable insight into "who a people thought they were and how they got to be that way."[81] Building on Baptist's contention, this thesis will turn perceived drawbacks regarding the efficacy and accuracy of WPA narratives into investigative opportunities to further elucidate the experiences of perceptions about mixed-race women over the course of the early twentieth century.

Moving away from this thesis' methodology, this introductory chapter will outline the history of the 'mulatta' in the United States by charting the legislative measures, sociological studies, and cultural representations which formed the basis of popular understandings of mixed-race women during the early-twentieth century. By situating the 'mulatta' within the broader context of American culture, it will determine how these women navigated their contested existence when racial intermixture was deemed particularly taboo. This introduction will begin by surveying the scientific understandings of racial hybridity published by major white legislators, anthropologists and sociologists. It will then explore the evolution of the 'tragic mulatta' literary trope over the course of the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth century; from an abolitionist narrative device to a character used by African-Americans to critique dominant societal norms surrounding race and gender, and challenge the ways in which the boundaries of racial designation and perceived psychological parameters of mixed-racial identity were fortified by legislative measures.

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[80] Edward E. Baptist, ''Stol' and Fetched Here': Enslaved Migration, Ex-Slave Narratives, and Vernacular History,' in Edward E. Baptist and Stephanie M.H. Camp's (eds.) *New Studies in the History of American Slavery,* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2006) p.247

[81] Baptist, 'Stol' and Fetched Here,' p.245

Historical Context

Fortifying the Boundaries of Race

Consumed with delineating the complex permutations of race, anthropologists, eugenicists, and sociologists throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries sought to account for the existence of mixed-race people caught between the 'pure' black and white races. According to political scientist Kim Williams, the 'mulatto' category was introduced to the U.S. Census in 1850, as a means to test Josiah C. Nott's theory that the progeny of interracial unions, or "Hybrids," were weaker and therefore more prone to live shorter lives than members of the black or white race.[82] Charting the adoption of the 'mulatto' category, Williams notes that it appeared in all subsequent censuses, including 1890 when 'quadroon' and 'octoroon' also made one-time appearances. The 'mulatto' category was briefly dropped in 1900 and reappeared in 1910, before making a final appearance in the 1920 census, when Williams claims that the "decades-long search for evidence that mulattos were susceptible to early death was finally abandoned."[83]

It can also be argued however, that the decision to remove the inconsistently-used 'mulatto' category from the census in 1920 signalled a conscious attempt to secure the borders of the white race by eradicating an 'in-between' space for people of mixed-race to identify. This decision not only signified the full-adoption of the 'one-drop rule,' but also evidences the perceived threat to the dominant racial hierarchy posed by mixed-race Americans; a phenomenon that Winthrop Jordan has aptly termed 'Mulattophobia.'[84] Central to this phobia was a fear that mixed-race individuals would 'pass' as white to infiltrate the white race, marry white Americans, and corrupt the white gene pool. In order to prevent the possibility of miscegenation and police the colour line, the criterion of racial classification was redrafted by various states. Virginia was one of the most historically rigorous states in terms of ensuring that the designation of 'white' remained exclusive while also providing a valuable example of the plasticity of racial classification, evidenced through its shifting legal criterion for the designation 'mulatto.' In 1750, Virginia passed an Act clarifying the designation 'mulatto,' which stated:

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[82] Kim M. Williams, *Mark One or More: Civil Rights in Multiracial America*, (The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2006) p.23; and Josiah C. Nott, *Two Lectures, On the Natural History of the Caucasian and Negro Races*, (Mobile, Dade and Thompson, 1844) pp.30-32
[83] Williams, *Mark One or More* p.23
[84] Jordan, 'Historical Origins of the One-Drop Racial Rule in the United States,' p.114

> "for clearing all manner of doubts which hereafter may happen to arise upon the construction of this act, or any other act, who shall be accounted a mulatto: Be it [etc] that the child of an Indian, and the child, grandchild, or great grandchild or a negro shall be deemed, accounted, held, and taken to be a mulatto."[85]

This Act was upheld until 1785 when it was decided that individuals with "one-fourth or more Negro blood shall… be deemed a mulatto," before being further modified in 1866 to clarify the categorisation of Native-Americans: "Every person having one-fourth or more Negro blood shall be deemed a colored person, and every person not a colored person having one-fourth or more Indian blood shall be deemed an Indian."[86]

The ability to classify a Virginian individual 'mulatto' became even more difficult at the turn of the twentieth century however. In 1910, the state court changed its legislation from considering one-fourth 'Negro blood quantum' to one-eighth to classify a person 'Negro,' and then in 1924, under the ardent encouragement of State Registrar of Statistics Walter Plecker, the Racial Integrity Act of Virginia was passed.[87] This Act stated that only those of 'pure' Caucasian blood could be deemed 'white,' and mixed-race people with a blood-quantum of one-sixteenth 'Negro blood' were therefore reclassified as 'colored.' Legislators in Georgia and Alabama were influenced to adopt similar prescriptions, and such measures not only made it harder for Americans to classify as 'white,' but also fuelled trepidations of the 'hybridised' people now excluded from such a designation. As shifting legal designations reassigned the status of mulattos to 'Negro' throughout the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, census data inevitably displayed a decline in 'mulatto' numbers. Some scientists attributed this decline as evidence that the genetically-inferior 'mulatto race' was untenable, an issue that will be explored later in this thesis, while some feared that they had 'passed' as white and infiltrated the white community.

In order to further police the colour line and 'protect' the white race from racial 'contamination' through racial passing, anti-miscegenation laws were introduced to criminalise intimate, interracial relationships. Although the first anti-miscegenation laws were passed during the colonial period, it was not until after emancipation and into the

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[85] Jack D. Forbes, 'The Classification of Native Americans as Mulattoes in Anglo-North America,' *Africans and Native Americans: the Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples*, (1993) p.195
[86] *Ibid*
[87] Peggy Pascoe, 'Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of "Race" in Twentieth-Century America,' *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 83, No. 1 (1996) p.59

twentieth century that such laws "began to function as the ultimate sanction of the American system of white supremacy."[88] While interracial sex was associated with salacious behaviour and immorality, in recognition of the social respectability and economic benefits that marriage carried, anti-miscegenation legislators focussed more on penalising interracial marriage than illicit sex or sexual misconduct.[89] Over the course of the 1910s and 1920s these state-specific legislative measures to prohibit interracial marriage featured at the forefront of nationalist concern, and many individual states either introduced new legislation or strengthened pre-existing laws. As historian Peggy Pascoe has identified, anti-miscegenation laws often did not prohibit marriage between blacks and Asian-Americans, or Asian-Americans and Native Americans, but that the laws were structured in a way that suggested all 'non-whites' posed a threat to the white race.[90] Moreover, while the list of races prohibited from marrying whites varied across states to include Chinese, Mongolian, Filipino, and Indian, among others, every single anti-miscegenation law banned whites from marrying blacks.[91]

This consistent legislative detail across the United States highlights the pervasive menace that African-Americans were believed to pose to the white race. Indeed, while some legislators warned of the threat that all non-white races posed, some states had strategic motives for interpreting anti-miscegenation legislation to exclude Native Americans. In Oklahoma for instance, a state where Native-Americans had a history of black intermarriage and owned quite a lot of land, legislators devised a unique legal definition of race in an effort to avoid offending the Indians of the Five Civilised Nations and simultaneously further white interests.[92] When Oklahoma published its state constitution in 1907, it legally defined Indians as 'white' by claiming that 'coloured' "shall be construed to mean or apply to all persons of African descent. The term 'white race' shall include all other persons."[93] After the constitution was ratified, statehood was celebrated with the symbolic marriage of a white man and Cherokee woman, the implications of which meant that white men could marry and

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[88] Anti-miscegenation legislation was a part of American law until ruled unconstitutional in 1967 by the Supreme Court in the landmark *Loving vs. Virginia* case. For a thorough analysis of this case, please see: Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America,* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009) pp.271-284. Quote taken from: Pascoe, 'Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of "Race" in Twentieth-Century America,' p.49

[89] Pascoe, 'Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of "Race" in Twentieth-Century America,' p.50

[90] Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally,* p.8

[91] *Ibid.*

[92] *Ibid,* p.121

[93] Fay A. Yarbrough, *Race and the Cherokee Nation: Sovereignty in the Nineteenth Century*, (Pennsylvania, 2008) p.125

inherit land from Cherokee women, but black men were prohibited from doing likewise.[94] Over the course of the first thirty years of the twentieth century, several states including Oklahoma (1907), Arkansas (1911), Tennessee (1917), Virginia (1924), Alabama (1927), and Georgia (1927) adopted 'one-drop' standards of racial purity and applied them to their anti-miscegenation legislation.[95] By the end of the 1930s, the list of races prohibited from marrying white Americans in anti-miscegenation laws were so specific that they included: Negroes, mulattoes, quadroons, octoroons, blacks, persons of African descent, Ethiopians, persons of colour, and half-breeds.[96]

Legislation such as the anti-miscegenation laws outlined above highlight the important ways in which race was understood and configured during the early-twentieth century. They demonstrate that the primary racial dynamic in the United States was, as it arguably continues to be, between black and white, and reveals the extent to which the physical disparity of 'blackness' and 'whiteness' was legally maintained. Such laws speak to the environment in which mixed-race Americans of both genders would have lived within, and therefore form an important context to understanding how mixed-race identity was constructed when the very existence of 'mulattos' was considered a legal and natural crime.

Strangers in the Land: Nativists, Eugenicists and Keeping the 'Danger' Contained[97]

Much of the rhetoric produced by prominent eugenicists during the early-twentieth century on the unnatural 'dangers' of miscegenation influenced the adoption of racial reclassification and anti-miscegenation measures. Established by Sir Francis Galton in 1883, the American Eugenics Movement addressed, among other things, the supposed biological difference between racial groups.[98] Emerging within the context of mass European immigration, concern surrounding the negative effects of 'racial hybridisation' between immigrants and whites heightened the already hyperbolic fear of black-white miscegenation.[99] More than fifty

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[94] Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally,* p.121
[95] *Ibid.,* p.119
[96] *Ibid.*
[97] This title of this subheading was influenced by the following publication: John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (1955)
[98] Gregory Michael Dorr and Angela Logan, '"Quality, Not Mere Quantity Counts:" Black Eugenics and the NAACP Baby Contests,' in Paul A. Lombardo (ed.) *A Century of Eugenics in America: From the Indiana Experiment to the Human Genome Era*, (Indiana University Press, 2011) p.70
[99] Over 23million immigrants entered the U.S. between 1880 and 1914, which influenced research into genetically-determined racial difference as it was widely-believed that this new influx of European immigrants were biologically-inclined to bring crime, disease and immorality to America's shores. For a fuller account of anti-immigration rhetoric, please see: Jemma Carter, '"Ours is a solemn moment. We stand at a crisis – the supreme crisis of the ages:" A Critical Analysis of the Paranoiac Nature of Early-Twentieth Century Anti-Immigration Rhetoric,' Unpublished Essay, (University of East Anglia, 2015) Also see: Kristofer Allerfeldt,

major crime-surveys were undertaken during the opening decades of the 1900s to "gather facts, educate the public, and make recommendations for criminal legislation" in response to America's expanding immigrant population.[100] The 1911 report produced by Leslie Hayford of the Dillingham Commission gave an apparently thorough analysis of "Immigration and Crime," concluding that certain immigrant groups could be associated with criminal behaviour, while sociologist I.A. Hourwich agreed that incarceration rates reflected a correlation between immigrants and crime.[101]

In the wake of the 1905 and 1917 Russian Revolutions, sensationalist newspapers reported that "The Shape of Your Head Reveals Your Radical-Tendencies;" while the Subway-Workers Strike in 1903 was reported under headlines such as "Italians Threaten Violence."[102] Headlines such as these bolstered notions of anarchist Russians and violent Italians, drawing strong links between race, physical appearance and adverse behaviour. In 1921, Vice-President Calvin Coolidge racialised legal discourse by contending that: "Biological laws tell us that certain divergent people will not mix or blend… Quality of mind and body suggests that observance of ethnic law is as great a necessity to a nation as immigration law."[103] Racialised rhetoric such as this led to one of the country's most restrictive immigration measures; the 1924 Immigration Restriction Act.[104] This paranoiac anti-immigration sentiment is significant because it criminalised racial difference, and propagated a distrust of anyone who fell outside the realm of white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant. While 'dangerous' races were successfully denigrated and excluded through the enactment of immigration restriction laws, focus on 'outsiders' within the United States intensified. If undesirables such as African-Americans and mulattos could not be excluded or deported, then they would have to be regulated through eugenicist intervention to avoid 'racial

Beyond the Huddled Masses: American Immigration and The Treaty of Versailles (2006) p.16; Allerfeldt, *Crime and the Rise of Modern America,* p.202; and S.T. Joshi, *Documents of American Prejudice: An Anthology of Writings on Race from Thomas Jefferson to David Duke,* (New York, 1999) p.498; Nancy Foner, *In a New Land: A Comparative View of Immigration*, (New York, 2005) p.13; and Daniel Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation: Outsiders in American History*, (2007) pp.133-135

[100] Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation*, pp.133-135

[101] Leslie Hayford, "Reports of the Immigration Commission: Immigration and Crime," (1911) Accessed via Harvard University Library Open Collections Program: http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/3909436?n=7&imagesize=1200&jp2Res=.25&printThumbnails=no Last accessed 8th May 2016; and I. A. Hourwich, 'Immigration and Crime', *The American Journal of Sociology,* Vol. 17, No.4 (1912) pp.478-490

[102] *New York Tribune*, May 13 1903.

[103] Calvin Coolidge, 'Whose Country is This?' *Good Housekeeping*, 72, no.2 (1921) p.14

[104] Indeed, it is no coincidence that Congressman Albert Johnson, chief author of this Act, was head of the Eugenics Research Association. For an analysis of Albert Johnson, please see: Kristofer Allerfeldt, 'And We Got Here First': Albert Johnson, National Origins and Self-Interest in the Immigration Debate of the 1920s,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 45, 1, (2010) pp.7-26

hybridisation' and black-white miscegenation, and the boundaries of race policed to prevent light-skinned 'outsiders' with innate criminal intent from infiltrating the white race.

Unhappy Hybrids and Marginal Men

In response to the xenophobic anxieties outlined above, eugenicist debate divided into two. Influenced in part by the "survival of the fittest" dogma propagated by Social Darwinism, positive eugenicist debate generally advocated increased procreation among the 'fit' population; while negative eugenic interventions proposed immigration restriction, segregation, and sterilisation to reduce growth of the 'unfit,' 'hybridised' population.[105] Of the two perspectives, negative intervention tended to dominate popular discourse as white racists found the scientific reassurance necessary to uphold white supremacy.[106] Organisations such as the Eugenics Record Office (ERO), founded in 1911 by the renowned biologist Charles B. Davenport and managed by eugenicist Harry H. Laughlin, conducted human heredity research and advocated laws which led to the forced sterilisation of Americans deemed 'socially inadequate.' It should be noted that the eugenics movement was not solely concerned with race, but also with factors which challenged white, largely male, middle-class privilege. The forced sterilisation of the white teen mother Carrie Buck following the 1927 *Buck v. Bell* case, is an example of the way in which negative eugenicist intervention was applied to Americans who did not fit dominant middle-class prescriptions of respectable white womanhood.[107]

Speaking to the fear of racial 'passing,' where those legally classified as Negro attempted to *pass* as white, ethnographer Robert Wilson Shufeldt focussed on the physiognomic nature of mixed-race or 'hybridised' people, claiming that: "these half-breed negroes… are dangerous from whatever point man may elect to view them, as they may possess all of the vicious and sensual traits of the negro, without the colour of the latter's skin as a warning flag to the unwary."[108] That Shufeldt deemed skin colour a "warning flag" of the insidious behaviour typical of African-American predisposition, not only reveals an investment in the notion of biologically-determined behavioural traits, but also the

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[105] Greg Carter, *The United States of the United Races: A Utopian History of Racial Mixing*, (New York, New York University Press, 2013) p.108; and Dorr and Logan, '"Quality, Not Mere Quantity Counts,"' p.70
[106] Siobhan Somerville, 'Scientific Racism and the Emergence of the Homosexual Body,' *Journal of the History of Sexuality,* Vol. 5, No. 2 (1994) p.257
[107] For further information on Carrie Buck and the *Buck v. Bell* case, please see: Paul Lombardo, *Three Generations, No Imbeciles: Eugenics, the Supreme Court, and Buck v. Bell* (The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2008)
[108] R.W. Shufeldt, *The Negro: A Menace to American Civilisation*, (Boston, 1907) p.91

importance placed on the visual recognition of race. Nearly a decade later Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), advocated a similar argument but stressed the notion of racial superiority.[109] According to Grant's logic that the offspring of white and non-white racial mixture would always revert to the 'lower' race, "the cross between a white man and a Negro is a Negro."[110] Grant asserted that despite the inheritance of white Euro-American physical characteristics, people of mixed-race would not inherit their moral or intellectual characteristics:

> Looking at any group of Negroes in America… it is easy to see that while they are all essentially Negroes, whether coal-black, brown or yellow, a great many of them have varying amounts of Nordic blood in them, which has in some respects modified their physical structure without transforming them in any way into white men.[111]

Referring to miscegenation as "a frightful disgrace to the dominant race," Grant concurred with Shufeldt's perceived 'danger' of hybrid people, and advocated legislation as a solution to the 'imminent extermination' of the white race: "The laws against miscegenation must be greatly extended if the higher races are to be maintained."[112] Following Grant's lead, Charles B. Davenport instigated an investigation into the effects of black-white racial inter-mixture. Scattered with statistical data and scientific 'evidence,' Davenport contributed to existing understandings of the intellectual inferiority and psychological distress of mixed-race offspring, arguing that: "one often sees in mulattoes an ambition and push combined with intellectual inadequacy which makes the unhappy hybrid dissatisfied with his lot and a nuisance to others."[113] According to Davenport, the disharmonic nuisance caused by these "unhappy hybrids" could be resolved through selective breeding, immigration restriction and, "selective elimination," to create a stronger American nation.[114]

In the field of sociology, and building on Davenport's notion of "unhappy hybrids," Edward Byron Reuter (1918) offered an analysis that "psychologically, the mulatto is an

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[109] Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race: Or The Racial Basis of European History*, Fourth Edition (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1916;1936)
[110] *Ibid.,* p.18
[111] *Ibid.,* p.82
[112] *Ibid.,* p.82, p.11 and p.60
[113] Charles Benedict Davenport, 'The Effects of Race Intermingling,' *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 56, No.4 (1917) pp.366-367
[114] *Ibid.,* p.368

unstable type."[115] Recognising the significance of outward appearance in the negotiation of mixed-race identity, his 1918 book, *The Mulatto in the United States,* traced an exhaustive quantitative and comparative study of mixed-race Americans. In particular, Reuter claimed that the physical characteristics of mixed-race people made them a distinct physical-type separate from both races but alien in both, a factor which "makes it impossible for them to escape the stigma which attaches itself to a tainted ancestry."[116] In Reuter's view, individuals with mixed-race ancestry generally:

> despise the lower race with a bitterness born of their degrading association with it... They everywhere endeavour to escape it and to conceal and forget their relationship to it. They are uncertain of their own worth… They envy the white, aspire to equality with them, and are embittered when the realisation of such ambition is denied them. They are a dissatisfied and an unhappy group.[117]

According to this logic, one way to escape their "tainted ancestry" and to be identified with the "superior group" could be achieved by hiding familial ties to dark relatives, marrying a white person and "obliterat[ing] from their offspring the physical characteristics which mark them as members of a backward and despised race."[118] This notion of 'passing' also occupied the minds of African-American creatives and intellectuals, and in 1925 black sociologist Charles S. Johnson published a report which deduced from census data that 355,000 blacks must have faded "into the great white multitude" between 1900 and 1920.[119] Acknowledging regional difference in mixed-race attitudes towards race however, Reuter argued that unlike in the Southern states where mixed-race Americans served as the 'mulatto leaders' of the African-American race, in the North, mulattoes "tend to form, a separate and exclusive class above the race," and are "contemptuous of the blacks who are socially below them and envious of the whites who are socially above them."[120] Reuter's findings were indicative of the staples of sociological thinking during the 1910s-1930s, that most mulattoes were

[115] Reuter, *The Mulatto in the United States,* pp.102-103
[116] *Ibid.,* p.19
[117] *Ibid.,* pp.102-103
[118] *Ibid.,* pp.315-316
[119] Werner Sollors, *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*, (Harvard University Press, 1997) p.281
[120] Reuter, *The Mulatto in the United States*, (1918) p.379

dissatisfied because they yearned to be white; and that their only happiness lay in aligning themselves with African-Americans.[121]

Another sociological concept known as the 'marginal man' theory can also be linked to Davenport's notion of "unhappy hybrids," and Reuter's "unstable type." First coined by sociologist Robert Ezra Park in 1926 and then further developed in 1935 by sociologist Everett Stonequist, the term 'marginal man' was used to describe the psychological identity conflict believed to be experienced by mixed-race individuals. Park stated that such individuals lived in "two worlds in both of which he is more or less a stranger," while Stonequist defined the 'marginal man' as "one who is poised in psychological uncertainty between two (or more) social worlds; reflecting in his soul the discords and harmonies, repulsions and attractions of their worlds."[122] Claiming that mixed-race people were aware of the conflict between the two races, Stonequist argued that mixed-race Americans internalised this conflict and, as a result, were "susceptible to inner conflict and self-hate, and likely to be over-anxious, maladjusted, unstable, introspective and suffer from inferiority complexes."[123] These complexes were particularly attributed to mixed-race women, whose 'hybrid blood' and female gender were believed to make them particularly susceptible to hysteria and an unstable pathological state.[124] Such ideas surrounding unstable and 'unhappy hybrids' propagated by white sociologists formed the basis of African-American creative responses. Indeed writers such as Nella Larsen, who was of mixed-race herself, strove to illustrate that any marginalisation displayed by women of mixed-racial heritage was in fact the result of societal factors, and it is important to recognise these complex and multifaceted understandings of race during the early-twentieth century.

The Trope of the Tragic Mulatta

The 'tragic mulatta' stereotype emerged during the nineteenth century as a rhetorical literary device to invoke abolitionist empathy and identification, and has been analysed by literary

[121] Spencer, *Reproducing Race*, p.43
[122] R. Park, 'Human Migration and the Marginal Man,' *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 33, No.6, (May, 1928) p.893; and Everett Stonequist, as quoted in: David Gilbert, 'Interrogating Mixed-Race: A Crisis of Ambiguity?' *Social Identities*, Vol. 11, No.1, (January 2005) p.60
[123] Spencer, *Reproducing Race*, p.45-46 and Everett Stonequist, as quoted in: Gilbert, 'Interrogating Mixed-Race: A Crisis of Ambiguity?' p.60
[124] For an analysis of the ways in which mixed-race writers articulated the psychological turmoil said to burden the mixed-race products of interracial relationships please see: Martha Gilman Bower, *"Color Struck" Under the Gaze: Ethnicity and the Pathology of Being in the Plays of Johnson, Hurston, Childress, Hansberry, and Kennedy*, (Praeger Publishers, Connecticut, 2003)

scholars since at least 1937 with Sterling Brown's *The Negro in American Fiction*.[125] In 1955, Arthur Davis outlined the term 'tragic mulatto' to denote: "a light-colored, mixed-blood character (possessing in most cases a white father and a colored mother), who suffers because of difficulties arising from his bi-racial background."[126] While Davis spoke of a male character, in order to be an effective plot device the 'tragic mulatto' was generally cast as a woman. Eve Raimon agrees that the "very tragedy of the figure's fate depend[ed] on her female gender," before arguing that that the "sexual vulnerability of a female light-skinned slave [was] essential to propel the plot forward and to generate the reader's sympathy and outrage."[127] Hazel Carby has argued that the mulatta served as a narrative device of mediation with two primary functions: "as a vehicle for an exploration of the relationship between the races and, at the same time, an expression of the relationship between the races."[128]

The 'tragic mulatta' has received significant attention within literary scholarship over the past eighty years. However Rainier Spencer argues that the term has been too liberally applied to mixed-race characters. He contends that scholars must distinguish between characters who merely live tragic lives or undergo tragic experiences, from the more specialised psycho-emotional understanding of the 'tragic mulatto,' lamenting that not all mulatto figures were necessarily 'tragic.'[129] For instance, Lydia Maria Child's 1842 novel *The Quadroons* is often cited by scholars as the first use of a 'tragic mulatta' character, but Spencer disagrees.[130] While the female mulatto characters within *The Quadroons* both die – one of a broken heart and the other from madness – Spencer states that "neither of these deaths is attributable to any internal racial conflict or desire for whiteness on their parts."[131] In his own definition, Spencer characterises the 'tragic mulatto' as a literary figure who "desires desperately to be white or who otherwise rejects or laments her or his blackness, and

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[125] Teresa C. Zackodnik, *The Mulatta and the Politics of Race*, (University Press of Mississippi, 2010) p.xi; and Sterling Brown, *The Negro in American Fiction* (1937)
[126] Arthur P. Davis, 'The Tragic Mulatto Theme in Six Works of Langston Hughes,' *Phylon*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (1955) p.195
[127] Raimon, *The Tragic Mulatta Revisited,* p.5
[128] Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*,(Oxford University Press, New York, 1987) p.89 and p.171
[129] Spencer, *Reproducing Race,* p.36
[130] For example, Teresa Zackodnik labels the 'tragic mulatto' Lydia Maria Child's "creation," while Dagmar Pegues claims that Lydia Maria Child "exploited the tragic mulatta stereotype" in *The Quadroons*. Zackodnik, *The Mulatta and the Politics of Race*, p.xiv; and Dagmar Pegues, 'Fear and Desire: Regional Aesthetics and Colonial Desire in Kate Chopin's Portrayals of the Tragic Mulatta Stereotype,' *Southern Literary Journal*, Volume xliii, No.1, (2010) p.3
[131] Spencer, *Reproducing Race*, p.36

whose *internal* racial struggle… is the chief source of intense personal tension."[132] He argues that "without the explicit psycho-emotional trauma caused specifically by racial mixture, such a mulatto character is not tragic."[133] While Spencer's insistence that few 'true' 'tragic mulatta' characters exist is an important consideration, it is more significant to recognise the development and transformation of the mulatta trope throughout the early twentieth century.

Charting the use of the 'tragic mulatta' trope by African-American women from the 1840s to the 1950s, Teresa Zackodnik identifies that the figure was used to:

> invoke and manage both American and British abolitionist empathy and identification; to contest racialised notions of womanhood in the postbellum United States; to critique the politics and proclivities of the 'New Negro Renaissance;' to play on the taxonomic fever of early-twentieth century American culture; and to question postwar optimism at mid-century.[134]

Looking specifically at black women's creative explorations of the mulatta, Zackodnik argues that in the hands of these writers the mulatta "becomes not a figure through which white fantasies of racial difference are played out but rather one through which the color line is tested and transgressed."[135] Building on this, Zackodnik demonstrates that the mulatta figure was also used by writers to transgress other socially-policed lines such as class, gender and sexuality.[136] In particular, as black cultural identity was redefined during the literary and intellectual movement known as the Harlem or 'New Negro' Renaissance, the mulatta figure became a way to condemn societal norms and expectations. In a tone similar to that argued by Rainier Spencer, Zackodnik argues that within the 1928 novel, *Quicksand,* author Nella Larsen underscored that womanhood and race were dialectical constructs rather than essential identities; and consequently suggests that Larsen's mulatta character Helga does not suffer an identity crisis because of her mixed-race blood, but rather as a result of societal expectations of such heritage.[137] Critiquing dominant representations of black womanhood as "overdetermined performances commodified by both the black bourgeoisie and white primitivists," Zackodnik contends that Larsen concentrated her critique of societal expectations on issues of class, intra-racial gender dynamics, and the rhetorical discourse of

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[132] *Ibid.*, pp.35-36
[133] *Ibid.*, p.36
[134] Zackodnik, *The Mulatta and the Politics of Race*, p.xi
[135] *Ibid.,* p.xvii
[136] *Ibid.*, p.128
[137] *Ibid.,* p.136

the New Negro cultural moment.[138] A scene from *Quicksand*, in which Helga visits a Harlem cabaret club, epitomises this interpretation. While on the dancefloor of the club, Helga finds herself 'transported' by the sounds of the jazz band:

> She was drugged, lifted, sustained, by the extraordinary music, blown out, ripped out, beaten out, by the joyous, wild, murky orchestra. The essence of life seems bodily motion. And when suddenly the music died, she dragged herself back to the present with a conscious effort; and a shameful certainty that not only had she been in the jungle, but that she enjoyed it, began to taunt her… She cloaked herself in a faint disgust as she watched the entertainers throw themselves about to the bursts of syncopated jangle, and when the time came again for the patrons to dance, she declined.[139]

Zackodnik argues that within this scene, Helga mistakes the fabricated blackness packaged as a form of entertainment for white consumption as indicative of African-American culture and identity itself.[140] Throughout *Quicksand*, Helga strives to remain at the boundaries of what she believes to be her innate, illicit 'blackness,' but Zackodnik points out that Helga "fails to recognise that what she sees as her forays into its 'essence' is a constructed and commodified spectacle feeding white voyeurism and white identity."[141] Focussing on the issue of intra-racial class pressure, Shane Vogel agrees that this cabaret scene turns out to be a "battleground over which the values of black middle-class morality are waged against the criminal intimacies and fugitive socialities of Harlem's nightlife."[142] It is such tension from America's 'New Negro,' black middle-class that Larsen arguably aimed to confront. As the course of the novel progresses and Helga displays a sense of frustration and restlessness, Larsen parodies the idea that such marginalisation was the result of her mixed-race 'blood,' by instead suggesting that her dissatisfaction was due to the limitations that the black middle-class places on all women within the African-American community.[143] Zackodnik concludes that Helga holds thoroughly middle-class views towards sexuality, and that the uncertainty she feels regarding the expression of desire is equally shared by Robert Anderson and other

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[138] *Ibid*
[139] Nella Larsen, *Quicksand* (New York: Dover Publications, 1928: 2006) p.54
[140] Zackodnik, *The Mulatta and the Politics of Race*, p.139
[141] *Ibid.,* p.140
[142] Shane Vogel, *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret: Race, Sexuality,* Performance (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2009) pp.93-94
[143] Zackodnik, *The Mulatta and the Politics of Race*, p.146

members of the black bourgeoisie, regardless of their genealogy.[144] As a result, Helga's frustrations alienation and conflicted sense of self stem from a reaction to her fabled 'blood,' not an expression of that blood itself.[145]

The trope of the 'tragic mulatta' was used by writers such as Nella Larsen as a form of social commentary throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth century, because the significance of the mulatta stretched beyond the bounds of literature and into American society itself. Indeed, the societal beliefs surrounding race and gender that Larsen so skilfully critiqued, were supported by scientific understandings of racial hybridity propagated by major white legislators and sociologists. As both the real and literary mulattas' ability to destabilise traditionally raced gender lines disrupted well-established notions of white womanhood, her racial liminality suggested that race, and therefore 'whiteness,' was also contingent. The rhetoric of white legislators and eugenicists outlined above provides an important insight into the environmental context in which Americans like Larsen, herself a woman of mixed-race descent, would have constructed their mixed-racial identities' when the very existence of 'mulattos' was so heavily contested.

Interracial Intimacies: White-Caucasian Women and African-American Men

The history of interracial relationships in the United States is fraught with hypocrisy and hyperbole, none more so than the sexual intimacies between white women and black men. It was noted earlier that while relations between white men and black women could be tolerated as a means to generate economic gain through the birth of more slaves, the mere suggestion of intimacy between a white woman and a black man could provoke violent ramifications.[146] During the antebellum era interracial relationships between white women and free black men, while frowned upon, were not generally considered a threat to white patriarchy because the system of slavery ensured that the vast majority of African-Americans were denied access to political, social and economic rights. As a way to explain white female – black male relations, some historians argue that away from the racialised hierarchies of 'civilised' American society, the 'Frontier' provided a space in which social stigmas and regulations were discarded by those living in the 'wilderness.'[147] Known as the 'Frontier Thesis,' this

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[144] *Ibid.,* p.147
[145] *Ibid.,* p.150
[146] Crystal Feimster, *Southern Horrors,*p.90; and Randall Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption*, (New York, Random House, 2003) p.76
[147] Daniel Sharfstein, *The Invisible Line: A Secret History of Race in America*, (New York, Penguin Books, 2011) p.49

theory contends that proximity to the frontier, and a shortage of women within these spaces, resulted in more relaxed attitudes towards white female – black male contact.[148] There are many examples of interracial relationships between white women and black men which seemingly adhere to this theory. For instance, in Clay County, Kentucky in 1841, a twenty-five year old Clarsy Centers moved into the cabin of George Freeman, a black man twice her age, and was pregnant with his child.[149] As George was 'colored' and Clarsy 'white,' they were prohibited from marrying under Kentucky law but nonetheless lived together with George's large free black family as an unmarried couple.[150] Having travelled thousands of miles with her family over the course of her life, and already a mother to a baby boy, it can be argued that regardless of racial status and anti-miscegenation law, George offered Clarsy stability. Her sister Malinda also stayed when the rest of their family moved on, again suggesting that the Freeman's were better able to provide economic stability and personal safety to these women.[151] With that in mind, it could be argued that it was the promise of security which lead many poor white women like Clarsy and Malinda to cross the colour line, rather than their proximity to the 'Frontier.' Indeed, contesting the universal applicability of the 'Frontier Thesis,' historian Gary Mills has shown that in Alabama, a high number of white women were involved in interracial relationships during the last two decades of the antebellum era, despite the fact that most of the 'frontier' characteristics would have subsided.[152] Moreover, the 'Frontier Thesis' does not explain the interracial relationships which took place in the Upper South, away from the frontier.

Moving beyond this theory, it is more widely agreed that relationships between white women and black men were believed to have occurred between members of the lower classes, where society's 'moral and respectable codes' were more loosely adhered to. Surviving evidence of such relationships do tend to concern interracial relations that existed between lower-status individuals. This could be for a number of reasons. While interracial sex amongst the lower orders of society could be overlooked, any interracial intimacy involving upper-class white women was much harder to ignore. Indeed it should be considered that wealthy white men who discovered that a female member of their family had

[148] Gary B. Mills, 'Miscegenation and the Free Negro in Antebellum 'Anglo' Alabama: A Reexamination of Southern Race Relations,' *Journal of American History*, Vol.68, No.1 (June, 1981) p.26
[149] The journey that the Centers family took across the frontier is traced in: Daniel J. Sharfstein, *The Invisible Line*, pp.47-52
[150] *Ibid.* p.49
[151] *Ibid.* p.50
[152] Mills, 'Miscegenation and the Free Negro in Antebellum 'Anglo' Alabama,' pp.26-27

engaged in interracial relations, not only had the power to hide such evidence, but may have been motivated to do so to ensure that their own reputation as a white father, brother or even husband had not been undermined by a black man. That said though, it can be determined that poor white women transgressed the boundaries of interracial social and sexual intercourse more often than did economically-privileged women.[153]

Following the Civil War and Emancipation, however, any previous toleration for interracial contact between black men and white women dissipated. The development of a new social order suddenly placed the black population in competition with whites for regional resources formerly denied to them. Previously controlled and contained as slaves, a new more sinister vision of the "Negro" menace emerged among Southern whites.[154] Within this context that a period now referred to as the 'Black Holocaust' ensued, and white Americans, predominantly but not exclusively, in the South lynched thousands of African-Americans.[155] It is difficult to determine the exact number of people lynched during this period, as many lynchings were not recorded, however historians such as Kristofer Allerfeldt and Amy Louise Wood agree that between 1880 and 1940 white mobs in the South killed at least 3,200 black men.[156] At the heart of the pro-lynching crusade against black equality, lay the image of violated white womanhood. Deemed sexually vivacious with a bestial appetite for innocent white women, the spectre of the black male rapist haunted the cultural landscape of the Reconstruction South. Anxieties surrounding interracial contact between black men and white women had been expressed as early as the 1864 presidential campaign, when the Democrats accused Lincoln and the Republican Party of promoting 'miscegenation.' In the

[153] Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social & Sexual Control in the Old South*, (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1992) p.89. To suggest that all white women involved in interracial relationships were degenerates, however, is restrictive. In his study of antebellum Alabama, Mills argued that the white female participants in interracial relationships could not be relegated to the role of prostitutes, noting that while they "most often fell within the lower economic ranks, little evidence exists to classify them as a group of degenerates." Gary B. Mills, 'Miscegenation and the Free Negro in Antebellum 'Anglo' Alabama: A Reexamination of Southern Race Relations,' *Journal of American History*, Vol.68, No.1 (June, 1981) p.24. This observation can also be linked to a study conducted by W.E.B. DuBois at the end of the nineteenth-century. His 1899 book, *The Philadelphia Negro*, reported that DuBois had identified thirty-three interracial marriages within a single Philadelphia ward and up to one hundred and fifty across the city. Finding that most of these marriages were between black men and white women, he also found it to be untrue, at least in Philadelphia, that the only people drawn to interracial marriage were the dregs of society, but rather that the bulk of mixed marriages involved members of the respectable 'labouring classes.' Randall Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption*, (New York, Random House, 2003) pp.71-72

[154] Allerfeldt, *Crime and the Rise of Modern America,* p.46

[155] *Ibid.* pp.45-47

[156] It is worth noting that across this period, mobs also subjected Native Americans, Mexicans, and women of all races to extra-legal violence, however, the vast majority of lynchings were perpetrated against African-American men. Allerfeldt, *Crime and the Rise of Modern America,* p.47; Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009) p.3

post-war context southern Democrats continued this rhetoric and reasoned that if black men were given full citizenship rights they would inevitably endeavour to pursue sexual relationships with white women.[157] Despite statistical evidence produced by anti-lynching activists such as Ida B. Wells which showed that only one-third of the black lynch-mob victims had been accused of rape, the "old threadbare lie" of the black rapist conquered the Southern racists' mind, and continued to justify extra-legal violence.[158] Much of this violence against black men had more to do with ensuring the supremacy of white patriarchy than the protection of white womanhood. By constructing the image of the black rapist, however, southern white men sought to challenge black men's social, political and economic rights as citizens while simultaneously expanding their own sexual power over all women, regardless of race.[159]

The loss of the Civil War emasculated Southern men in a variety of ways, and as white men previously deemed 'manly' faced failure, new understandings of Southern 'masculinity' emerged as a way for white men to regain positions of power.[160] The ultimate 'prize' within this new model of masculinity was the white female body, and the ability to possess not only white but also black women, symbolised total racial and gender domination.[161] The sexual possession of a black woman's body by a white man demonstrated the powerlessness of the black man, and that he could not even claim sole rights over women of his own race.[162] Cultural images of the 'bestial' black rapist reveals, however, that there was still a perceived anxiety that black men could physically threaten white America's self-conception of 'masculine' supremacy.[163] Indeed, a black man's sexual 'conquest' of a white woman empowered him, and undermined white masculinity.[164] As a result, the social reputation of a white woman who chose a black male partner had to be lowered to prevent the elevation of any black man participating in such a relationship, and to confirm that the preferred sexual choice of any decent, respectable white woman would be a white man.[165] Ignoring centuries of black female sexual exploitation at the hands of white men, a new

[157] Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, p.50
[158] *Ibid.* pp.90-92
[159] Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, p.5; and Bynum, *Unruly Women,* p.96
[160] Mitchell, *Living with Lynching,* p.68
[161] Bynum, *Unruly Women,* p.97
[162] *Ibid.* p.96
[163] Trudier Harris, *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals*, (Indiana, 1984) pp.29-30
[164] Bynum, *Unruly Women,* p.97
[165] *Ibid.* pp.97-98

discourse emerged which almost exclusively defined rape as a crime committed by black men against white women.[166]

There are two infamous examples of white America's utter condemnation of any white female – black male intimacy. Probably one of the most high-profile interracial marriages between a white woman and black man during the late-nineteenth century, was that of Frederick Douglass to his second wife Helen Pitts. Married on January 24 1884, by the well-known minister Francis J. Grimké, public reactions to their union were negative across the colour line.[167] Indeed, in his biography of Douglass, Booker T. Washington contended that the extent to which anti-amalgamation sentiment was entrenched in the minds of black and white Americans alike, had "never been so clearly demonstrated as in this case."[168] In the media, one white-Virginian newspaper branded their marriage "a deliberate challenge to the Caucasian race," and Douglass a "lecherous old African Solomon."[169] This negative perception was shared, although for differing reasons, by a substantial number of black Americans. Black journalist T. Thomas Fortune claimed, for instance, that "the colored ladies take [Douglass's marriage] as a slight, if not an insult, to their race and their beauty," and maintained that "big colored men, like big white men, owe some deference to the prejudices of the people they represent."[170] Highlighting the, oft-times hypocritical, history of interracial relationships in the U.S., Douglass responded to the backlash while speaking to one audience and jokingly explained: "My first wife, you see, was the color of my mother, and my second wife the color of my father… I wanted to be perfectly fair to both races."[171] Sarcasm aside, Douglass confided to Elizabeth Cady Stanton: "I would never have been at peace with my own soul or held up my head among men had I allowed the fear of popular clamor to deter me from following my convictions as to this marriage. I should have gone to my grave a self-accused and a self-convicted moral coward."[172] Douglass biographer Waldo Martin notes that while Douglass delighted in challenging America's taboo against interracial marriage, "he

[166] Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, p.5
[167] Waldo E. Martin, *Mind of Frederick Douglass*, (University of North Carolina Press, 1984) p.98; Francis J. Grimké later justified their marriage in the article: 'The Second Marriage of Frederick Douglass,' *Journal of Negro History*, 19, (1934) p.324
[168] Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies,* p.73
[169] Martin, *Mind of Frederick Douglass*, p.99 quoting the *Franklin Gazette,* (Va.) February 1, 1884
[170] Quoted in: Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies,* p.73; and Martin, *Mind of Frederick Douglass*, p.99
[171] Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies,* p.74
[172] Martin, *Mind of Frederick Douglass*, p.99

received the greatest pleasure from simply marrying the woman of his choice, who happened to be white."[173]

A man who undeniably became the sexual and racial scapegoat of the early-twentieth century for his numerous relationships with white women, was Jack Johnson.[174] The first African-American boxer to receive international stardom, Johnson had a reputation for challenging the boundaries of the colour line both in- and outside the ring. Not only a physical threat to the ideological assumptions of white male supremacy, most controversial of all was that over the course of fifteen years, he further threatened white masculinity by marrying three white women. He met Etta Terry Duryea in 1909, and although they married in January 1911, Johnson continued to have a live-in mistress and visit prostitutes. In addition to the infidelity Johnson beat Duryea, once so badly that she was hospitalised. In September 1912, she committed suicide.[175] Although the precise reasons remain unclear, it is likely that alongside the physical abuse she suffered, a sense of social isolation resulting from her interracial relationship contributed to her despondency. According to historian Randall Kennedy, she reportedly confided in a maid that "I am a white woman and tired of being a social outcast;" and that "all my misery comes through marrying a black man. Even the negroes don't respect me. They hate me."[176] Revealing a potential sense of guilt over the pressures Duryea may have felt from the African-American community as a white woman married to a black man, a week after her death the *Chicago Defender* ran the headline: "Mrs Johnson Was Not Hated by Negroes."[177] This suicide provided 'evidence' to critiques of 'amalgamation' that the dangers to white women engaged in interracial relations were real, with one white editorialist commenting that it showed "how sharp is the line that runs between the races."[178]

Soon after Duryea committed suicide, Johnson began dating Lucille Cameron. As was the case with many white women engaged in interracial relationships, Cameron was accused of insanity, and after her own mother filed a kidnapping report, claiming that her daughter was mentally-unstable, she proclaimed: "I would rather see my daughter spend the rest of her

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[173] *Ibid.* p.100
[174] The term 'sexual and racial scapegoat' was coined by Kevin Mumford. *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1997) p.4
[175] *The Gazette Times*, (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) September 13 1912, p. 6
[176] Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies,* pp.80-81
[177] *Chicago Defender*, September 14, 1912, p.1
[178] Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies,* p.81

life in an insane asylum that see her the plaything of a nigger."[179] In October 1912, Johnson was arrested under the *Mann Act* for driving across state lines with Cameron. Responses from the African-American community varied, with some viewing the prosecution as another example of white racism against a black man who refused to 'kowtow' to white societal conventions, while others viewed Johnson's actions as an irresponsible embarrassment to the black race.[180] After Johnson's alleged violation of the *Mann Act*, the black-run *Philadelphia Tribune* published a headline which read: "Jack Johnson, Dangerously Ill, Victim of White Fever;" and an article in the *Birmingham Exchange* asserted that every "race-loving Negro… must indefatigably denounce Johnson's debased allegiance with the other race's women."[181] In response to these events some white governmental officials articulated their opposition. The governor of Virginia denoted Johnson's interracial matrimonial history "a desecration of one of our most sacred rites;" while the governor of New York claimed it "a blot on our civilisation;" and the governor of South Carolina asked, 'If we cannot protect our white women from black fiends, where is our boasted civilisation?"[182] Taking his opinion to the House of Representatives, Seaborn A. Roddenberry of Georgia proposed a constitutional amendment stipulating that marriage between "persons of color and Caucasians…[be] forever prohibited."[183] Lauding the South's solution to the 'Negro problem,' Roddenberry claimed that "no African within all of Dixie land carries in his heart the hope or cherishes in his mind the aspiration that he can ever lead there to the altar of matrimony a woman of Caucasian blood."[184] By contrast, he charged that within certain Northern states a white woman is permitted to be "made the slave of an African brute… by the form of a marriage ceremony." Towards the end of his impassioned rant, he informed the House that:

> "no blacker incubus ever fixed its slimy claws upon the social body of this Republic than the embryonic cancer of Negro marriage to white women in certain parts of our country… No more voracious parasite ever sucked at the heart of pure society, innocent girlhood, or Caucasian motherhood than the one which

[179] Quoted in Mumford, *Interzones*, p.9
[180] Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies,* p.82
[181] Quotes taken from Randy Roberts, *Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of White Hopes*, (New York, The Free Press, 1983) pp.141-147; and also feature in Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies,* p.83
[182] Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies,* p.83
[183] Seaborn A. Roddenberry, December 10 1912. *Congressional Record Containing the Proceedings and Debates of the Sixty-Second Congress, Third Session*, Volume 49, Parts 1-3 (Washington, 1913) Accessed via: https://archive.org/stream/congressionalrec49eunit#page/n255/mode/2up
[184] *Ibid.,* p.502

> welcomes and recognises the sacred ties of wedlock between Africa and America."[185]

It is noted within the Congressional Record that these comments were met with applause.[186] In spite of the extensive political and negative press attention, Johnson married Cameron on December 4 1912, less than three months after his ex-wife's death.[187] Cameron divorced him in 1924 because of infidelity, and the following year Johnson married his third white wife, Irene Pineau.

Each of these examples demonstrate the ways in which relationships between black men and white women were perceived, presented and challenged over the course of the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth century. Defamation of character was frequently cast on the black male involved, before the psychological stability or moral standing of the white partner was questioned. These examples provide an integral insight into the social and political context within which the product of interracial unions would have existed, and highlight the distinctly American anxiety surrounding the idea of white women bearing a black man's child.

Biracial Babies and White Mothers during the Nineteenth Century

While the vilification of the 'bestial' black body in American culture has been outlined above and addressed by historians such as, Trudier Harris, Jennifer L. Morgan, Crystal N. Feimster, and Winthrop Jordan, less attention has been paid to the folktales surrounding the 'terrifying' black baby.[188] Emerging during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, 'black baby' fables reflected the 'Mulattophobia' and racial hysteria of the period.[189] An example includes a Louisiana folktale about a young Cajun woman who finds an orphan baby boy apparently abandoned in the woods. Not yet a mother herself, she kneels to pray gratitude for the blessing of a handsome son for her husband, when the baby shrieks in response to her

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[185] *Ibid.* pp.503-504
[186] *Ibid.* p.504
[187] Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies,* p.81
[188] Harris, *Exorcising Blackness*, pp.29-30; Jennifer L. Morgan, '"Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder:" Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770,' *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol.54, No.1 (1997) pp.167-192; Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, p.164; and Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1977)
[189] Laura Dawkins, 'Black Babies, White Hysteria: The Dark Child in African-American Literature of the Harlem Renaissance,' in Caroline Field Levander and Carol J. Singley's (eds.) *The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader*, (Rutgers University Press, 2003) p.168; and Jordan, 'Historical Origins of the One-Drop Racial Rule in the United States,' p.114

prayers and, to the woman's surprise, the baby "wasn't no pink-and-white baby like before, no, but a thing what was all black and shiny and ugly."[190] Frightened, the women makes the sign of the cross, an action which causes "the Devil" creature to shriek some more before running deeper into the woods. The symbolic transformation of a 'perfect' white baby into a black, and simultaneously demonic, creature cannot be overlooked. Citing an adapted version of this story, which featured in a collection of children's horror stories almost fifty years later, historian Laura Dawkins points out that such tales were continually recounted because of their ability to inspire terror.[191]

The specific nature of this terror connects to the adoption of the concept of "reversion" and "atavism" that dominated turn-of-the-century pseudo-scientific understandings of race.[192] In particular, this notion of a "reversion to type" directly links to the rhetoric of white supremacists such as Robert Wilson Shufeldt, Madison Grant, and Edward Byron Reuter, who warned that "the vicious and sensual traits of the negro" are inherited by mixed-race individuals, whose "tainted ancestry" means they always revert to the 'lower' race, because "the cross between a white man and a Negro is a Negro."[193] Designed to alert white women about the dangers of interracial relations with men that possessed even an "invisible drop of Negro blood," tales such as Thomas Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots* warned that "a man or woman of Negro ancestry, though a century removed, will suddenly breed back to a pure Negro child, thick-lipped, kinky-headed, flat-nosed, black-skinned."[194] Even blunter was the assertion that: "Amalgamation simply meant Africanisation. The big nostrils, flat nose, massive jaw, protruding lip and kinky hair will register their animal marks over the proudest intellect and the rarest beauty of any other race. The rule that had no exception was that one drop of Negro blood makes a negro."[195]

Not content with the level of such fear-mongering, some went as far as to suggest that all interracial relationships should be prohibited. According to black activist Ida B. Wells, a

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[190] Lyle Saxon, Robert Tallant, and Edward Dryer, *Gumbo Ya-Ya: A Collection of Louisiana Folk Tales*, Louisiana Writers Project Publications (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1945) pp.192-193 Accessed via: https://archive.org/details/gumboyaya00louirich Last accessed 09/01/2019

[191] Robert D. San Souci claims to have adapted the tale "The Thing in the Woods," which features in his collection of horror stories for children, from *Gumbo Ya-Ya: A Collection of Louisiana Folk Tales*. Robert D. San Souci, *More Short and Shivery: Thirty Terrifying Tales*, (New York, Delacorte Press, 1994; 2015) pp.172-177 and p.211. Dawkins, 'Black Babies, White Hysteria,' p.167

[192] Dawkins, 'Black Babies, White Hysteria,' p.168

[193] Shufeldt, *The Negro: A Menace to American Civilisation*, p.91; Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race.* p.18; and Reuter, *The Mulatto in the United States,* p.19 and pp.102-103

[194] Thomas Dixon Jr, *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden, 1865-1900* (New York, Doubleday Page & Co. 1903) p.394. Accessed via: https://archive.org/details/cu31924031174620

[195] *Ibid.* p.382

propaganda news article entitled "The Rushing in of Fools" was circulated with the intention of impeding the integration of women's clubs. The news item describes how the racial integration of a women's club in an unnamed city lead to the white president's daughter marrying the son of a fellow club member. After the birth of their first child, it is revealed that the club member's son was so light-complexioned that he was not recognised as black, and when his young white wife gave birth to a "jet black baby… the shock was so great that [she] turned her face to the wall and died."[196] While evident that the story was contrived, it was nonetheless picked up by the press who, according to Angela Davis, "widely disseminated the message that integrated women's clubs would result in the defilement of white womanhood."[197] The 'fear' of the black baby also featured in the fiction of Harlem Renaissance writers, albeit in a more satirical and cynical form, as a way to critique the existence of colourism within the African-American community. Eloise Bibb Thompson's '*Masks*' and Wallace Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry*, Jessie Fauset's *Comedy American Style*, and Marita Boner's short story '*On the Altar*,' all contained references to women screaming in horror, being "abysmally stunned," and refusing to believe that a black-skinned baby born to them was indeed their own.[198]

The historical stigma attached to white mothers who bore 'black babies' has not yet faded, as contemporary sociological research on white mothers to biracial children argues that: "White mother families will be more likely to come from households with lower family income," that they "will also experience higher levels of stigma, have more issues with their family of origin, and that their lack of previous experiences with racism will not allow them to help their child navigate racism."[199] While such research is based on more recent case studies, the disproved hypotheses posed nonetheless raise important considerations for the stereotypes and challenges that a white woman mother raising a biracial child during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century would have faced.

Building on the pseudo-scientific understandings of race which propagated the concept of "reversion to type," 'black baby' fables therefore underscore the widespread anxieties about the "tainted ancestry" believed to be the result of interracial relationships.

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[196] Ida B. Wells cited in Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, & Class*, (New York, Vintage Books, 1983) p.128
[197] Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, & Class*, (New York, Vintage Books, 1983) p.128
[198] Laura Dawkins gives a brief outline of these stories in the following article: Dawkins, 'Black Babies, White Hysteria,' p.168
[199] Sarah Schlabach, 'The Importance of Family, Race, and Gender for Multiracial Adolescent Well-Being,' *Family Relations*, Vol. 62 (February 2013) p.158

Examining the lived experience of women born to white mothers in the context of such scientific and cultural publications, can therefore shed further light on the reality of race relations throughout the period.

Thesis Overview

This thesis is divided into three main chapters. Chapter One opens this research by focussing on arguably the most immediate part of the mixed-race experience: appearance. Through an examination of the African-American beauty industry, and the visual media which accompanied it, the first chapter will explore the ways in which the phenotypical features associated with mixed-race female bodies were understood and negotiated across the early twentieth century. It will identify a shift away from the privileging of features linked to mixed black-white heritage, which had historically been used as a way to police upward social mobility within African-American communities. Instead, this chapter will show that the 1920s witnessed the formation of a new form of black womanhood which linked 'lightness' with black urban modernity. While some historians argue that the popularity of skin bleaching and hair straightening preparations within black communities provides evidence of the internalisation of white racism, this chapter will contend that through the use of such products, African-Americans re-signified Euro-American standards of beauty to evoke a unique and symbolic cultural aesthetic, precisely at a time when black culture was being redefined. In particular, it will be shown that black-owned cosmetic companies and the products they sold became tangible signifiers of black engagement in American consumerism, and symbolised black entrepreneurship, racial progress and racial pride. By extension, the physical aesthetic gained from following the regimes promoted by these companies became tied up in the same connotations, and were disassociated from the notion of possessing white heritage. Indeed, it will be shown that precisely because stereotypes of mixed-race women as 'tragic mulattas,' sexual-deviants, and unstable hybrids dominated popular culture, the pursuit of lighter skin was not bound up in a desire to insinuate proximity to 'genealogically' white Caucasian heritage. Little work has been done to consider how the women who naturally embodied this desired aesthetic negotiated their physicality at a time when mixed-race bodies were often typecast in popular culture as promiscuous, degenerate or elitist. The second part of Chapter One will therefore explore the ways in which mixed-race women navigated this environment by attributing their physical features to alternative ethnic identities. Attempting to separate the value placed on this aesthetic from the internalised racism theory is problematic, especially as these features did adhere to white standards of

beauty. Although impossible to deny that many African-Americans did internalise damaging beliefs as a result of Euro-American standards of beauty, this chapter will contend that additional motivations and understandings behind these practices existed, and must be recognised. Ultimately, this chapter not only explores how the mixed-race female body was viewed, understood, and negotiated within the social and cultural landscape of the early twentieth century, but also complicates understandings of colourism and standards of beauty within African-American communities throughout the period.

Moving away from the challenges of negotiating the physical features of a mixed-race body, Chapter Two will give voice to a selection of mixed-race women to reveal how they positioned themselves within the context of dominant cultural, sociological and scientific ideas about racial mixture. It will achieve this by analysing the creative works and autobiographical writings of Anita Thompson Dickinson Reynolds, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Zora Neale Hurston, and Georgia Douglas Johnson. Each of these women spoke to their experiences as light-skinned African-American women in ways that demonstrated not only their encounters with white racism but also intra-racial colourism. By producing narratives which addressed the existence of mixed-race Americans, their work challenged the notion of homogeneity within African-American communities, and subsequently revealed a broader understanding of how these communities functioned. Through creative expressions and private considerations, their words revealed that physically embodying the legacy of a mixed-race ancestry led to differing, but nonetheless important, experiences both within local African-American communities and the wider American society. Moreover, by exploring the years spanning the Harlem Renaissance through the eyes of mixed-race women, and placing their words in conversation with each other, this chapter will offer a new perspective on this well-examined movement.

Chapter Three will bring the thesis to an end by presenting two main case studies, each focussed on the life of a biracial woman born to a white mother and a black father during late nineteenth and early twentieth century. While all forms of interracial intimacy were derided throughout the period, specific focus has been placed on the experience of women born to a white mother and a black father, because the mere suggestion of intimacy between a white woman and a black man undermined white male hegemony, and could provoke violent ramifications.[200] Building on the testimonies examined in Chapter Two, this

[200] Feimster, *Southern Horrors,*p.90; and Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies,* p.76

chapter will contend that there would have been a marked difference between an individual knowing that interracial relations had taken place somewhere in their past, but being raised by two parents that identified as African-American, and the experience of being the direct product of a relationship between two people who identified as disparate racial groups. The first case study will focus on the life of Angelina Weld Grimké, while the second will examine Philippa Duke Schuyler.

Born in 1880 Angelina spent her formative years in Washington DC, meaning that she was not only present during the development of a turn-of-the-century black literary tradition, but also the emergence of eugenics and theories pertaining to 'hybrid degeneracy.' Philippa on the other hand was born in New York's Harlem over fifty years after Grimké in 1931, and was heralded as a rebuttal to twentieth-century eugenicist tracts about 'hybrid degeneracy' which pervaded during Grimké's youth. Examining the lives of these two women side-by-side is valuable in a number of ways. To begin, as both of these women were born within the institution of marriage they would not, in theory, have suffered the same taint of illegitimacy which often effected the lives of biracial and mixed-race Americans whose parents may have been unable to marry due to state miscegenation laws, or those who had been coercively conceived. Despite this, however, neither of them identified as biracial and instead they each negotiated their biracial identity in differing ways. While Grimké chose to identify as an African-American woman and fully engaged herself with the African-American intelligentsia in Washington DC, Schuyler distanced herself from both her white and black heritage by creating a new identity and passing as an 'Iberian' named Felipa Monterro.[201] Secondly, this chapter will show that age formed an important catalyst to the major changes in the lives of both Grimké and Schuyler, changes which influenced the negotiation of their biracial identity. At the age of seven Grimké's mother, claimed that her biracial heritage had become more perceptible to members of the public and to Grimké herself. As a result, she relinquished all maternal rights, returning Grimké to the sole care of her father and never saw her daughter again. For Philippa, the significance of age became apparent at the age of twenty-one. After a performance at a classical recital, Philippa was no longer perceived as the biracial child genius which had characterised her youth, but was instead styled the world's most talented 'Negro' pianist. This chapter will show that for both women, whether at the age of seven or twenty-one, their childhood innocence which had framed their ability to

[201] Caroline A. Streeter, *Tragic No More: Mixed-Race Women and the Nexus of Sex and Celebrity*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012) p.120

symbolise a bridge between the races was curbed, and no adult equivalent existed within the public sphere for the space they had occupied as biracial children.

Overall, this thesis will more thoroughly interrogate the symbolic iconographies, sociological assertions and creative contentions that held a persistent presence in the early-twentieth century, to determine what mixed-racial heritage physically, legally, and emotionally embodied for women of black-white descent. It will complicate existing historiography by challenging interpretations that have failed to account for variations in racial heritage and skin tone, and provide a nuanced contribution to the field of Critical Mixed-Race Studies by more closely situating the lived experiences of mixed-race women within the context of their cultural environment. In particular, this thesis will show that many mixed-race women, whose bodies and minds were sites over which racial, cultural and political ideologies were contested throughout the period, sought to reclaim agency through methods such as writing themselves into existence, and crafting alternative racial identities which aligned with their own understanding of race.

Chapter 1

“Pride in Our Race Demands that we look Light, Bright, and Attractive:” Brown Beauty and Biracial Bodies

Skin colour is, arguably, the first thing one notices in a social interaction. Whether consciously or not, and regardless of whether the recognition of a person's skin colour leads to prejudice, as visual beings the physical is always the most obvious. The significance of the physical is particularly evident when it is considered that, as Ian F. Haney Lopez has argued, features such as skin colour and hair texture were the two key signifiers used to police the binary boundary of race in the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[202] They were also the two features at the forefront of twentieth century debates surrounding racial identity, black authenticity and racial uplift. This chapter will explore the ways in which the phenotypical features associated with mixed-race and biracial female bodies were understood and negotiated across the period in question, and address the existence of a seemingly paradoxical standard of beauty within African-American communities. It will ascertain what it meant to physically occupy a body which, based on appearance and regardless of racial heritage, was not recognised under the law as anything other than 'Negro,' and which many believed carried the social taint of sexual exploitation and miscegenation. Although the phenotypical features of mixed-racial heritage, namely light brown skin and straight hair, were privileged throughout African-American visual culture, little work has been done to consider how the women who naturally embodied this aesthetic negotiated their physicality when mixed-race bodies were often typecast in popular culture as promiscuous, degenerate or elitist. While the rise of a so-called 'mulatto elite' between the years 1880 and 1920 dictated that entry into the upper echelons of black society be exclusively reserved for those with "a light complexion and 'good hair,'" the 1920s witnessed a shift away from this privileging of mixed black-white heritage, to a new form of black womanhood which linked 'lightness' with social status and engagement in American consumerism.[203]

The first section of this chapter will analyse the emergence of the light-skinned 'New Negro' woman during the 1920s; an idealised figure who possessed the beauty, sobriety and moral standing necessary to engage in urban modernity, but who was not viewed as

[202] Ian F. Haney Lopez, 'The Social Construction of Race,' in Richard Del Gado and Jean Stefancic (eds.) *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), pp.163-175
[203] Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920*, (Arkansas, University of Arkansas Press, 2000) p.160

possessing black-white heritage. Achieved through the use of skin bleaching creams and hair straightening products, it will be shown that the desire to attain the aesthetic of the 'New Negro' woman with light brown skin and 'well-groomed' hair was not motivated by a desire to emulate the 'whiteness' of mixed-race heritage, or adhere to the values of historic 'blue vein societies.'[204] Instead, this chapter will argue that within some African-American communities, particularly urban centres such as Indianapolis, Washington D.C. and New York City's Harlem, the light brown skin of the 'New Negro' woman embodied a new meaning, unique to the context of the early-twentieth century, and signified active participation in American consumerism and urban modernity, as well as cultural ties to Africa, rather than an emulation or privileging of 'whiteness.'

While scholarly attention has tended to focus on separate elements of the Harlem or New Negro Renaissance, such as literature, intellectual discourse, art, advertising and consumerism, this chapter will build on the contentions of historian Anne Elizabeth Carroll and consider the way in which many of these elements intersected.[205] In particular, it will analyse how the rise of the African-American cosmetic industry, which featured hair-straightening preparations and skin bleaching creams, influenced New Negro discourse and popular aspirations. Historical debate on the impact of skin bleaching advertisements produced for African-American consumers during the early-twentieth century, has typically explored the extent to which the imagery and copy of such advertisements fuelled desire among African-Americans to 'become' white, and as a result furthered white, hierarchical and hegemonic standards of beauty.[206] While not disagreeing with these claims this chapter will instead present an alternative argument, revealing that a great deal of consideration, agency, and symbolism was evident in the active decision to bleach ones skin. In 2011, Jacob Dorman critiqued the assertions of fellow historian Lawrence Levine, by opposing Levine's claim that the preferred aesthetic of African-Americans during the 1920s was 'brown' rather than white; arguing that Levine's contention did not consider the advertisements promising *whiter* skin.[207] However, in a stance closely-aligned with, but not fully-supporting, Levine's

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[204] Blue vein societies were clubs said to exist within the late-eighteenth to early twentieth century which enforced entry tests based on racial 'signifiers' such as the visibility of 'blue veins.' Audrey Elisa Kerr, 'The Paper Bag Principle: Of the Myth and the Motion of Colorism,' *Journal of American Folklore,* 118, 469 (2005) pp.271-278

[205] Anne Elizabeth Carroll, *Word, Image, and the New Negro: Representation and Identity in the Harlem Renaissance*, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2007) p.3

[206] Yaba Amgborale Blay,' Skin Bleaching and Global White Supremacy: By Way of Introduction,' *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol.4, No.4, (June 2011) pp.4-46

[207] Jacob S. Dorman, 'Skin Bleach and Civilisation: The Racial Formation of Blackness in 1920s Harlem,' *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol. 4, No.4 (2011) p.73, note 2

argument, this chapter will contest Dorman's focus on the use of the word 'white,' and reveal that the multifaceted meanings behind colour designation during the 1920s, alongside particular New Negro aspirations, signified a desire to achieve 'lightness' rather than 'whiteness.' It will build on the work of historian Laila Haidarali, who argued in 2018, that the use of the term 'brown' as a racial identifier carried significant meanings during the 1920s, particularly for African-American women, and became fundamentally connected to racial progress and social mobility.[208]

While acknowledging, and not denying, the history of white supremacy and subsequent white emulation in the United States, this chapter will complicate the simple contention that all African-Americans who used skin bleaching products and straightened their hair wanted to be 'white,' by exploring the way in which women of black-white mixed-racial descent were derided within many African-American communities, due to painful historical links to the reality of white-male black female rape under slavery. Precisely because stereotypes of mixed-race women as conflicted sexual-deviants continued to dominate popular culture, it will be shown that the pursuit of lighter skin was not bound up in a desire to emulate proximity to 'genealogically' white Caucasian heritage, and instead that a light brown or 'bright' complexion was the ultimate aim. Unlike the privileging of mixed-white heritage upheld by the mulatto elite in previous decades, 'brightness' during the 1920s signified participation in black consumerism and engagement with urban modernity. Indeed, although in many instances the light-brown skinned 'New Negro' woman visually embodied the features of mixed-racial heritage, her image was used to juxtapose the sexually-deviant 'mulatta.' In addition, by exploring the popularity of sun tanning within white American communities and contrasting it to the skin bleaching practices of African-Americans, it will be shown that the symbolic significance of a light brown skin tone shifted throughout the early-twentieth century, having a lasting effect on the way in which mixed-race women were represented and understood.

The second part of this chapter will build on this idea by exploring the ways in which mixed-race women unable to identify as 'mixed' or biracial, navigated this environment by attributing their physical features to alternative ethnic identities. As black-white intermixture held a contentious place in the American imaginary, mixed-race bodies in the public eye were made Mediterranean, Cuban, Native American or 'Oriental.' The oral history WPA narratives

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[208] Laila Haidarali, *Brown Beauty: Color, Sex, and Race from the Harlem Renaissance to World War II*, (New York, New York University Press, 2018) p.7 and p.18

provided by the formerly enslaved and their descendants during the 1930s will be used to highlight the conscious attempt by African-Americans of all shades and degrees of racial heritage to consciously refashion their identity, and expose the ways in which perceptions of skin tone, physical appearance and stereotypes about mixed-racial heritage shaped the lives of mixed-race women. Links will also be drawn to the testimonies of mixed-race and biracial women such as Anita Reynolds and Philippa Schuyler, who frequently attributed their brown skin to 'exotic' racial identities outside of their own heritage.

The overall aim of this chapter is to therefore complicate understandings of colourism and standards of beauty within African-American communities during the early twentieth century. It has long been recognised that cosmetics serve as a medium of self-expression, and this chapter will argue that whitening powders and skin bleaching creams provided African-American women with the ability to reconfigure a new identity in-line with the 'New Negro' aspirations to be 'light, bright, and attractive' as put forth by the literary and visual media of advertisers, writers and intellectuals. Moreover, this chapter will explore the conceptual labyrinth of intra-racial colourism, and supplement existing historiography by contending that 'lightness' rather than 'whiteness' dominated the beauty aspirations of African-American women during the New Negro era. By acknowledging the ways in which light brown bodies not aligned with the New Negro ideal were exoticised by both advertisers and women of mixed-racial heritage themselves, a greater understanding of the ways in which the phenotypical features associated with mixed-race and biracial bodies were negotiated, reimagined and conveyed multiple meanings will be achieved.

Scholarly debate surrounding the impact of skin bleaching and hair straightening within African-American communities has typically focused on the extent to which adverts fuelled African-Americans' desire to 'become' white and, in doing so, furthered white, hierarchical and hegemonic standards of beauty.[209] However, it can be argued that a greater deal of consideration, agency, and symbolism played into the active decision to bleach ones skin and straighten ones hair. To begin, it is worth briefly outlining the dominant narrative regarding skin bleaching that this chapter aims to challenge. Many psychological and sociological studies concerned with the issue of skin bleaching, have aligned themselves with the Fanonian 'self-hate thesis.'[210] Frantz Fanon contended that colonised subjects internalised

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[209] Blay,' Skin Bleaching and Global White Supremacy,' pp.4-46

[210] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Charles Lam Markmann, (London, Pluto Press, 1986)

negative associations attributable to having dark skin, as propagated by colonizers.[211] In the United States, the dissemination of Eurocentric aesthetic ideals, which privileged Euro-American physical features, meant that African-Americans internalised the idea that dark skin and "kinky hair" were the antithesis to Caucasian 'perfection.' It is here that many scholars and commentators engaged in anti-racist discourse argue that African-Americans who chose to physically change their appearance had fallen prey to internalised racism. Indeed, the title of Fanon's notion seminal work *Black Skin, White Mask* fits almost seamlessly with the idea that black people who underwent skin bleaching practices were literally attempting to imitate whiteness. Building on this theory this chapter will, however, suggest that these motivations alone do not account for individual agency. Looking beyond the dominant 'self-hate' thesis can provide a greater understanding of how colourism really operated, and potentially reveal the multi-faceted reasons behind preferences of shade, ultimately exposing further insight into the lived experience and intra-racial dynamics of African-American communities in the urban North during the early twentieth century. Moreover, by complicating the dominant narrative regarding colour preference, the paradoxical lived experience which women of mixed-racial heritage faced within this context can be uncovered.

Several scholars support the endeavour to complicate understandings behind the motivations of skin bleaching and hair straightening practices. Political psychologist Christopher Charles has called for more diversified analyses which consider the "different histories, cultures, socialization practices, personalities, individual experiences and belief systems" of people who decide to bleach their skin.[212] Additionally, sociologist Shirley Anne Tate has critiqued Sheila Jeffery's contention that black women want to be white, and that the beauty practices of black women demonstrate internalised racism.[213] Instead, Tate highlights that the beauty practices and embodiments popular within black communities are "given meaning and value within a Black aesthetic space and no other space is aimed for or desired."[214] Charles' call for a more diversified analysis that considers different socialisation practices and individual experiences, and Tate's emphasis on the unique value systems within a black aesthetic space, can be placed within the context of the New Negro Renaissance. Indeed, it can be argued that the physical aesthetic of pressed hair and, to an extent, the use of

[211] *Ibid.* pp.114-115
[212] Christopher A.D. Charles, 'Liberating Skin Bleachers: From Mental Pathology to Complex Personhood,' *JENdA: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, Issue 14 (2009) p.87
[213] Tate, *Black Beauty: Aesthetics, Stylization, Politics*, pp.112-113
[214] *Ibid.* p.112

skin lightening products, not only signified the symbolic shedding of the remnants of enslavement, the economic emancipation of the 'New Negro' woman and engagement in black modernity; but that the beauty practices conducted in beauty shops and domestic spheres across the country also held particular mnemonic meanings within African-American communities; specifically, feelings of trust, comfort and nurturing. Following in the vein of historian Deborah Thomas, it can be argued that by appropriating and re-signifying Euro-American cultural customs, African-Americans aspired to a modernity of their own making within the context of their own communities.[215] Through the use of skin 'brightening' lotions and by employing hair straightening techniques, African-Americans could create a light brown aesthetic with new styles and haircare practices that were unique to black culture, precisely at a time when black culture and identity was being redefined. Historian Laila Haidarali agrees that throughout the interwar years, diverse groups of African-Americans privileged brown complexions, aligning "brown beauty" with middle-class values, and reworking visual representations of modern, respectable 'New Negro' womanhood.[216]

Conversely, it is important to recognise that access to many forms of employment throughout this era required adherence to a certain aesthetic. Women, and indeed men could be, and still are, turned away from jobs as waiters or receptionists because their hair was not 'appropriately' groomed or they were deemed too dark. The adoption of these practices may also, therefore, have stemmed from a practical need to conform in order to obtain economic security. Such motivations could perhaps be likened to 9-5 passing, and reveal that such consumers had not internalised racist conventions, nor were they striving for a 'New Negro' aesthetic, but rather they were putting on the corporeal uniforms needed in order to survive within this particular context.[217] In order to more fully understand the decisions made by black women to adopt such beauty practices, it is therefore essential to not only recognise the reality of internalised racism, but to locate the bodies of black women in the spaces and time in which they moved, and acknowledge the motivations and justifications which encouraged adherence to these aesthetic values.[218]

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[215] Deborah A. Thomas, *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica*, (Duke University Press, Durham, 2004) p.8

[216] Haidarali, *Brown Beauty,* pp.3-7

[217] My theory of a 'corporeal uniform' can be linked to Hobbs definition of 9 to 5 passing. Hobbs, *A Chosen Exile*, p.29, p.150, p.153 and p.172

[218] Blain Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women: Race and Beauty in the Twentieth-Century South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014) p.70

The Emergence of the New Negro

The New Negro, or Harlem, Renaissance was a literary, artistic and intellectual movement that occurred during the 1920s and 1930s, in which black culture and black identity was consciously reimagined and redefined.[219] Within this movement, the idea of a 'New Negro' emerged in African-American discourse as a figure to counter the derogatory minstrel caricatures that dominated American culture. Harvard scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. has identified that in addition to transforming racist images, the 'New Negro's' intention was to restructure the *race's* image of *itself*.[220] More often than not this image was created in the form of a 'New Negro' woman, who possessed the beauty, sobriety and moral standing necessary to engage in urban modernity, and who countered the asexual, aggressive, and dark-skinned 'Mammy' character that pervaded dominant white-societal representations of African-American women (See Fig.1 and Fig.2) Closely linked to the anti-lynching campaign of the late-nineteenth century, the redefining of black womanhood was central to racial uplift discourse within African-American communities throughout the ensuing decades. The ubiquitous statement: 'I cannot imagine such a creature as a virtuous Negro woman,' served as a catalyst to nationalising the black women's club movement across the United States, and the enforcement of black middle-class ideas of religiosity.[221] Tied up in these conventions of respectable black womanhood, was the importance of domestic order, personal cleanliness, and good-grooming. The period was marked by an increased awareness of personal and domestic hygiene and a belief that keeping clean ensured good health, economic success, and

[219] While most historians agree that the Harlem Renaissance occurred during the 1920s and 1930s, some historians such as Treva B. Lindsey call for the periodisation of the era to be expanded to acknowledge the contributions of black women such as Fannie Barrier Williams and Anna Julia Cooper at the end of the nineteenth century. Treva B. Linsey, *Colored No More: Reinventing Black Womanhood in Washington D.C.*, (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2017) pp.12-14

[220] For instance, in 1904 John Henry Adams wrote an essay entitled: 'A Study of the Features of the New Negro Woman,' emphasising the central role of women to the 'New Negro' movement. He produced images of seven ideal Negro women. Please see: Henry Louis Gates Jr., 'The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black,' *Representations*, No.24, (1988) pp.140-144; and Peiss, *Hope in a Jar,* pp.204-205

[221] Mitchell, *Living with Lynching,* p.29; and Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America,* (New York, 1984) p.108 and pp.180-181

Figure 1: The popular 'Mammy' image was used in advertisements for brands such as *Aunt Jemima* (c.1896)

Figure 2: John H. Adams, Jr., 'A Study of the Features of the New Negro Woman.' (1904)

romance. As cleanliness came to symbolise moral and social superiority, an abundance of soap advertisements reinforced women's evolving role within the domestic sphere.[222] The concurrent rise of colonialism during the late-nineteenth century, led to the global projection of dirtiness as inherent to the blackness of colonial subjects. Historian Yaba Amgborale Blay has argued that the 1875 advert for Pear's Soap underscores this projection (see Fig.3.)
The advert in question features the image of a young black boy apparently being bathed for the first time, and plays on the "washing the Ethiopian white" fable.[223] In this illustration, as the young boy emerges from the bath, his skin appears white while his face remains black, an occurrence that Blay attributes to the fact that as the face "more often than not carries the immutable signs of phenotypical/racial categorization, one's face (read: race) cannot be changed."[224]

[222] For an analysis of the history of hygiene in American, please see: Juliann Sivulka, *Stronger Than Dirt: A Cultural History of Advertising Personal Hygiene in America, 1875-1940*, (New York: Humanity Books, 2001)
[223] Blay, 'Skin Bleaching and Global White Supremacy,' pp.13-15
[224] *Ibid.* p.18

Figure 3: Pears Soap Advertisement, *The Graphic,* (1884)

Within such advertisements, 'whiteness' was literally synonymous with high morals, respectable civility, and cleanliness. Twentieth-century discourse concerning skin bleaching and the 'New Negro' woman should therefore be considered alongside the long history of racialised morality, investment in the 'politics of respectability,' and the efforts to define how African-American should women look, and behave, as the agents of cleanliness.[225] Deeming the body as one of the central tenets of racial uplift, the Women's Convention of the National Baptist Convention distributed tracts to the Baptist Church's working-class constituency with titles such as "How to Dress" and "Take a Bath First."[226] Such efforts aimed to undermine white racist ideas about the hygiene and morality of African-Americans which were rooted in historical constructions which had served as justification for their subordination under enslavement.[227]

Following the nineteenth-century's focus on the moral and social superiority of cleanliness, at the dawn of the twentieth century the racial uplift discourse of black

[225] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham coined the term 'politics of respectability,' please see: Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, (Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1997); and Blay, 'Skin Bleaching and Global White Supremacy,' p.20
[226] Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women,* p.65
[227] *Ibid.* p.65

intellectuals, entrepreneurs and social critics continued to concentrate on the body, but became bound up in debates surrounding beauty, cosmetics and adornment. In what Davarian L. Baldwin terms the "cult of the natural," African-American commentators such as Fannie Barrier Williams and Nannie Helen Burroughs, who held reform visons of New Negro womanhood, chastised newly-formed hair and beauty schools by arguing that grooming practices were meant to subdue, not highlight physical features.[228] As the commercialisation of the black haircare industry emerged with a series of straightening systems and products, one of the main issues surrounded how to define racial authenticity through physical appearance and respectable self-presentation. While many critics pointed to the safety implications of using hot combs to straighten black hair, the development of such regimes primarily offended because they indicated a desire of users to be white, and reformers reasoned that beauticians were therefore promoting discriminatory beauty ideals.[229] Critics of beauty products and services framed darker skin and naturally curly hair as a "more authentic form of black embodiment," and accused black women who used products to straighten their hair or lighten their skin of trying to 'get white.'[230] In 1904, Burroughs stated that: "What every woman who bleaches and straightens out needs, is not her appearance changed, but her mind changed."[231]

It is significant, however, that even although this rhetoric continued into the 1920s with individuals such as Marcus Garvey denouncing the class of "want-to-be-white' Negroes who peal [sic] their skins off and straighten their hair" in order to "share the blessings of the prosperous white race," Burroughs would later change her standpoint.[232] Indeed, by 1936 Burroughs instead argued in favour of pressed styles and black beauty culturists, insisting that black women "should not be apologetic or feel ashamed of the desire to make ourselves more presentable and beautiful."[233] It is this notion of unashamedly pursuing beauty that characterised the shift in discourse across the 1920s and 1930s. Although the products themselves continued to elicit debate, beauty culturalists and advertisers attested that African

[228] Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*: *Modernity, the Great Migration, & Black Urban Life*, (The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2007) pp.55-57
[229] Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women,* p.59 and p.66
[230] Maxine Leeds Craig, 'Colour of an Ideal Negro Beauty Queen: Miss Bronze 1961 - 1968,' in Evelyn Nakano Glenn's (ed.) *Shades of Difference: Why Skin Color Matters*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009) p.87 and Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women*, p.68
[231] Nannie Burroughs quoted in: Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women*, p.66
[232] Marcus Garvey's denunciation is quoted in: Susannah Walker, *Style and Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women, 1920-1975*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007) p.64
[233] Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women,* p.70

Americans had the same ‘natural’ right as all women to be beautiful.[234] The advertising manager for the *Messenger*, Louis W. George, for instance noted the efforts of white women “to become beautiful or as near so as possible” through the use of cosmetics, and reasoned that “the colored girl today would greatly limit her opportunities did she not make use of hair dressing, manicuring and facial massaging’ to advance her place in society.”[235]

This rights-based discourse, which also pointed to the accessibility of goods, services and products as a means to equality, intersected with the rhetoric of New Negro womanhood.[236] This shift in opinion is important as it reveals the complex and ever-changing understandings of what constituted black beauty, respectability, and an authentically African-American identity over the course of the early twentieth century, particularly during the interwar years. The adoption and propagation of this rights-based discourse can, in many ways, be attributed to the marketing techniques employed by black-owned beauty manufacturing companies who played a pivotal role in casting “hair and skin preparations” in race-positive terms.[237]

Race Wonder Women: The Emergence of Malone and Walker[238]

The history of black hair grooming is rooted in African customs, which were carried across the Atlantic when the mass enslavement of Africans to the Americas occurred from the mid-seventeenth Century onwards. In certain African communities, hair was valued as a medium of communication, with hairstyles pointing to an individual’s surname, occupation, or social status. Although the conditions of slavery drastically inhibited the attention that could be devoted to hairstyling rituals, practices were adapted to the harsh realities of the plantation.[239] Intricate protective hairstyles such as plaits and knots were created in slave cabins during the downtime that was afforded, and enslaved women wore colourful bandanas, not only to protect from sunstroke, but also to convey a sense of individual expression.[240] After emancipation, newly-formed and white-owned companies marketed a variety of hair straightening products for black hair, which challenged the traditions of black hairstyling that

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[234] Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, p.211
[235] Haidarali, *Brown Beauty,* p.87
[236] *Ibid.* p.83 and p.19
[237] *Ibid.* p.89
[238] The term ‘Race Wonder Women’ is influenced by George Schuyler’s designation of Madam C.J. Walker as a “Race Wonder Woman.” Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, p.209
[239] Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women,* p.59
[240] *Ibid.* p.60; and Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin’: African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998) pp.40-48

had afforded a sense of pride for generations.[241] These hair straighteners contained damaging ingredients which could break hair and burn the scalp. Historian Blain Roberts points out that in addition to the damaging products marketed at black women, "a low-protein diet, excessive sun exposure, and a belief that washing hair once a month was sufficient to ward off diseases" combined to make black women particularly vulnerable to hair loss.[242] In response to the natural hair loss experienced by black women, and the effects caused by dangerous and damaging products, black beauty culturists were motivated to stake out a place in the consumer market of goods and services aimed at black women.[243]

The emergence of two female-owned African-American companies, in particular, changed the course of black haircare practices in significant and drastic ways; these companies were the *Poro* Company and the *Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company*. Established by Annie Turnbo Malone, *Poro* was the first to develop a comprehensive 'system' which included regular shampooing, scalp massage, and hair pressing or straightening. One of Malone's selling agents, Sarah Breedlove Davis, who later became known as Madam C. J. Walker, went on to head *Poro*'s largest rival in the hair-care industry. After being trained by Malone in the *Poro* system, in 1905 Madam C.J. Walker started her own line of hair care products for African-American consumers, which followed the "Walker Method" and eventually formed the *Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company*. At first she promoted her products by traveling around the country giving lecture-demonstrations and eventually training sales beauticians. Similar to the *Poro* system, the "Walker Method" involved the use of Walker formula products and a heated, wide-tooth metal comb to 'press' the hair and manipulate it into a number of styles.[244]

The entry of black female entrepreneurs such as Malone and Walker into the male-dominated public sphere of race enterprise, as well as a Victorian society which privileged notions of high morals, religiosity and inner beauty, would have been considered treasonous; particularly as race leaders adhered to a discourse which asserted that black women were naturally virtuous and moral, regardless of their adherence to white physical features and standards of beauty.[245] Critique of the work conducted by beauty culturists such as Malone and Walker were often aired within black churches during sermons which emphasised the

[241] Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women*, p.61
[242] *Ibid.* p.63
[243] *Ibid.*
[244] *Ibid.* p.64
[245] Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*, p.54 and p.58

value of modest, natural beauty and warned of the sin that was "tampering with God's handiwork."[246] In a 1993 interview, cosmetologist Marjorie Stewart Joyner recalled that black ministers would tell their female parishioners, "God made your hair like that and it's a sin to straighten your hair . . . and you must be interested in a red light district or you wouldn't be putting that rouge and lipstick on you and powdering up your face to look like white people."[247] In response to charges of white emulation, and rather than employing the glitz and glamour of the late 1910s and early 1920s which many reformers linked to immorality and vice, Malone and Walker redefined the 'politics of respectability' by urging customers to buy into the notion of racial advancement through good health and hygiene. By advertising her company as a 'missionary outpost' in the quest for racial uplift, Walker spoke at church functions and featured ministers' wives in advertising campaigns in part to dignify both hairdressing as a career and the beauty ritual itself.[248] Furthermore, as Noliwe M. Rooks has identified, black beauty culturists such as Malone and Walker specifically placed African-American women's bodies within the context of religious doctrine which dictated that women should strive to have long hair.[249] Other black culturists, too, used biblical references within their advertising by describing hair as a woman's "crown and glory," to counter the criticisms of religious organisations. For instance, while advertising her hair care formulation, Madam Newel urged consumers to not only "be satisfied with simply having your hair made to look beautiful, but grasp for all there is in the Crowning Glory of Woman – and let her grow yours."[250]

Following accusations that their companies conceded to white standards of beauty, Malone and Walker omitted any references to hair straightening in their advertisements and public speeches, with Walker demanding that newspapers characterise her work as 'hair cultivation' instead.[251] She argued:

> Right here let me correct the erroneous impression held by some that I claim to straighten the hair. I grow hair. I want the great masses

[246] Walker, *Style and Status*, pp.48-50
[247] *Ibid.* p.65
[248] Erin D. Chapman, *Prove It On Me: New Negroes, Sex, and Popular Culture in the 1920s*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) p.87; and Walker, *Style and Status*, p.65
[249] Noliwe M. Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996) p.49
[250] *Ibid.* p.45
[251] Kate Dossett, '"I Try to Live Somewhat in Keeping with my Reputation as a Wealthy Woman:" A'Lelia Walker and the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company,' *Journal of Women's History*, Volume 21, Number 2, (2009) p.97; and Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women*, p.64

of my people to take a greater pride in their personal appearance and
to give their hair proper attention. I deplore such an impression because
I have always held myself out as a hair culturist.[252]

These contentions were articulated on each Walker product, including the ‘Wonderful Hair Grower (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Madam C.J. Walker’s ‘Wonderful Hair Grower’ metal tin, c.1910s-1920s, *Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture*[253]

According to Walker the desire to look respectable did not signal, by definition, a desire to look white. Walker denied charges of her clients ‘trying to be white’ because a clean, healthy, well-styled head of hair, straightened with a heated comb before being curled and styled in the way deemed most fashionable, should not be seen as ‘white.’[254] Indeed, such up-styles featuring long stylised hair actually rejected the modern style of bobbed hair, popular amongst many white women of the period.[255] Blain Roberts argues that Walker and Malone’s projects, then, were a calculated challenge to white women’s exclusive monopoly on natural beauty and respectability.[256] Moreover, Roberts further adds that if the ‘politics of respectability’ was a reflection of the values of white America, some black women may have deemed adherence to its tenets as the most realistic way to subvert the logic of white

[252] Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women,* p.65
[253] Madam C.J. Walker’s ‘Wonderful Hair Grower’ metal tin, c.1910s-1920s, Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. Gift from Dawn Simon Spears and Alvin Spears, Sr. Object Number: 2011.159.6
[254] Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women,* p.68
[255] Haidarali, *Brown Beauty,* p.100
[256] Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women,* p.68

racism.[257] In 1925, sociologist Charles S. Johnson similarly reasoned that the use of cosmetics and ascriptions to dominant standards of beauty among marginalised people formed "an unconscious protest against inferior status."[258] Although it is difficult to determine whether the desire to subvert this logic formed the motivation for black women to follow these haircare systems, it is clear that black beauty culturists sought to rearticulate understandings of hair straightening practices. Moreover, while clubwomen and social welfare reformers focussed their efforts on pious black motherhood and the clean order of black homes, beauty culturists offered a new type of 'respectable' racial uplift through the economic independence of African-American women.[259]

Advocating the black beauty industry as a form of economic uplift, as well as a route to prosperity, respectability and independence, worked in several ways.[260] Whether as sales representatives for companies such as *Poro* and *Walker*, or as beauticians and hairdressers running salons within their own homes, black beauty culturists were trained and skilled labourers free from economic reliance on black husbands and white employers.[261] Within African-American communities, barbershops and beauty parlours were independent businesses with a steady clientele, and therefore important expressions of black entrepreneurial activity.[262] Walker's own by-the-boot-straps, washerwoman to millionaire story also aided the Company's endorsement of capitalist enterprise as a key strategy for social mobility.[263] It was argued, too, that clients benefited from economic uplift through the use of black beauty products and services. While Walker recognised early that the 'groomed' hairstyles created by trained hairstylists were preferred by employers, and therefore assisted the acquisition of jobs to black women, the association between a 'groomed' physical aesthetic and economic uplift became especially marked during the 1920s.

In particular, physical appearance and self-presentation became intrinsically linked to social freedom and economic possibility following the Great Migration of African-Americans to the urban North. Between 1915 and 1930 approximately 1.25 million African-Americans migrated North. Over the course of the 1920s as class-structures evolved within African-

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[257] Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women,* p.70
[258] Charles S. Johnson, 'Race Pride and Cosmetics,' *Opportunity*, 3, (October 1925) p.293. Also quoted in Haidarali, *Brown Beauty,* pp.87-88
[259] Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women,* p.70
[260] Walker, *Style and Status,* p.47
[261] Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women,* p.58
[262] Joe William Trotter Jr., 'From Hard Times to Hope,' *A History of the African American People: The History, Traditions & Culture of African Americans*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997) p.123
[263] Haidarali, *Brown Beauty,* p.89

American communities, many of these migrants obtained clerical and white-collar positions indoors; a shift from the traditionally agricultural occupations of the rural South. Disillusioned with growing poverty, strict segregation and increased racial violence in the South, and enticed by reports of economic opportunity following the industrial expansion of the First World War, migration represented a way to reinvent the self and secure a prosperous future. These major societal shifts following the Great Migration affected definitions of class and race, influencing the consumerist idea that beauty, and therefore social standing, could be purchased. Historian Kathy Peiss has even argued that a number of black women considered the use of beauty products a prerequisite to the journey North, believing that a makeover aided the acquisition of a new status.[264] Speaking of the young women that visited her salon from the South to have their hair straightened, Elizabeth Cardozo Barker explained that: "these little girls who came up from the South and never had their hair properly treated, oh, boy, what it did for their ego! It just seemed like it gave them a new lease on life!"[265] That Barker refers to these clients as "little girls" underscores the extent to which she viewed the process of hair straightening and the migration North itself as a process of maturity and a journey into urban womanhood.

In itself, the action of purchasing beauty products therefore represented a form of consumer citizenship which came to signify the economic freedom of urban African-American women. Indeed, the purchasing of cosmetics such as skin bleach and black haircare products facilitated consumer engagement in society.[266] Historian Treva Lindsey has argued that the rising popularity of products that bleached the skin and straightened the hair during this period, reflected an aspiration to "escape the vestiges of 'physical blackness,'" which not only located African-Americans at the bottom of the social and beauty hierarchy, but also connected them to a history of enslavement.[267] Other 'vestiges' of this dark past included the limited occupations available to African-American women outside of domestic service. In an attempt to shake such social barriers, therefore, newly-urban African-American women aspired to enter careers in professional and clerical environments. As entry into these positions often required a particular visual aesthetic of light-skin and well-groomed hair, the

[264] Peiss, *Hope in a Jar,* p.231
[265] Elizabeth Barker, Black Women Oral History Project, interview conducted by Marcia Greenlee, December 8, 1976, (Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.) p.19
[266] Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are used against Women,* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009) p.12; and Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*,
[267] Treva B. Lindsey, 'Black No More: Skin Bleaching and the Emergence of New Negro Womanhood Beauty Culture, *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol. 4 No. 4 (2011) p.102

African-American beauty industry not only provided the tools to enable access to these jobs, but also opened up a new range of careers available to black women outside of domestic service as beauticians, hairdressers, and sales representatives. While some women purchased these products or sought the services of black beauty culturists in order to obtain the corporeal uniform necessary to secure an occupation, it can also be argued that on many levels both the practice of hair pressing and the use of modern haircare products signified the symbolic shedding of the remnants of enslavement, and the economic emancipation of the 'New Negro' woman.[268] By re-signifying the cultural styles and customs formerly exclusively associated with upper and middle-class white women, African-American women aspired to a modernity and physical aesthetic of their own making within the context of their own communities.[269]

The successful use of 'New Negro' rhetoric and imagery of the 'New Negro Woman' within the cosmetic market was mirrored by white-owned companies seeking to capitalise on the social and economic anxieties of African-American consumers.[270] One of the most widely-distributed illustrations of this campaign featured two profiles of the same woman side-by-side. (See Fig.6) The woman is firstly depicted with dark skin looking backwards or to the left, and then with light brown skin facing forwards. Reinforcing this image are powerful lines such as: "Be attractive. Throw off the chains that have held you back from prosperity and happiness," and "Race women and race men protect your future by using Black and White Ointment."[271] Through these two guises and suggestive rhetoric, the advertisement implies that the woman firstly gazes at a 'dark' past and then a 'light' future. Her dark skin and backward glance not only represent the "chains" of slavery but also the backwardness of unrefined women, while the forward-looking woman insinuates that

[268] Lindsey, 'Black No More,' p.102
[269] Thomas, *Modern Blackness,* p.8
[270] The marketing techniques utilised during the 1919 advertising campaign for *Plough Chemical Company*'s "Black and White Ointment," have been addressed by several historians in their analyses of early-twentieth century skin bleaching rhetoric, but they are nonetheless worth revisiting to underscore the white exploitation of African-American discourse. For example, please see: Dorman, 'Skin Bleach and Civilisation,' p.60; and Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, p.211
[271] See: 'Black and White Ointment,' Plough Chemical Co. advertisement, *The Dallas Express*, 20 September 1919, p.12; and 'Black and White Ointment,' Plough Chemical Co. advertisement, *The New York Amsterdam News*, January 4, 1919, p.7

Figure 6: 'Black and White Ointment,' Plough Chemical Co. *The New York Amsterdam News*, January 4, 1919

Figure 7: Golden Brown Chemical Co. advertisement, *The Dallas Express*, 26 June 1920

consumers can "throw off the chains" and "protect their future," to strive towards a life free from the visual indicators and social remnants of slavery. By drawing on both the history of enslavement and contemporary discrimination, while also urging the necessity of securing a new aesthetic, the adverts capitalised on the perceived correlation between physical appearance and economic possibility prevalent within 'New Negro' discourse.

As a white-owned company tapping into the social anxieties expressed through black discourse, *Plough* represents one of the businesses that received a considerable amount of criticism during the 1920s for their interjection into African-American concerns. The white-owned *Golden Brown Chemical Company* also engaged with black discourse by fraudulently claiming to be part of the African-American community. Their adverts for the *Golden Brown* "Ointment" deceitfully claimed: "We cannot be white but, we can be light, bright and attractive," and "Look your best – be proud of your race." (See Fig.7)[272] Adding to this insult were concerns that white-manufactured products for African-American consumers often contained harsh chemicals unsuitable for human use. Letters of complaint filled the pages of African-American periodicals denouncing products which peeled and damaged the skin,

[272] Golden Brown Chemical Co. advertisement, *The Dallas Express*, 26 June 1920, p.3

leading to chronic illness or even death.[273] Rumours spread of a conspiracy to exploit African-Americans out of their money and maintain the white hierarchy of racialised beauty. *Half Century Magazine*'s editor-in-chief Katherine Williams ran editorials denouncing the African-American newspapers who "help a white man swindle the race" by printing the advertisements of white-owned manufacturers that "are selling our people fake preparations."[274]

Supplementing this, the discriminatory employment practices of white-owned firms led many African-Americans to believe they were denied jobs so that they did not see the harmful ingredients used in the products intended for their community. Businessman Claude Barnett bolstered this belief when he visited Plough's headquarters and claimed: "In their offices alone they have, I should say, ten times as many employees as Poro has… Not a black face was to be seen."[275] In a letter to *Half Century Magazine,* Mrs Mary Vaughan detailed her own bad experience with using products manufactured by white-owned businesses. After explaining that such products "poisoned" her skin and gave her "neuralgia and headaches," she resolved that "If I live a hundred years I will never put any powder on my face that is made by white people. I feel confident knowing that no colored person would knowingly make a preparation that would injure our women's skin."[276] The accuracy of these accusations is difficult to determine, especially those printed in *Half Century Magazine,* a periodical subsidised by Anthony Overton, owner of Overton-Hygienic Manufacturing Company, and who therefore had a direct interest in discrediting his competition.[277]

The attempts of white-owned cosmetic companies to engage with New Negro discourse, and falsely represent the interests of African-American consumers, worked to foster a sense of trust in the products and services of black-owned businesses, particularly those with a presence in the local community. The significance of the community to this process must be appreciated, as it was on the local level that these aspirations were born, performed, and replicated by black women across the generations.

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[273] Dangerous levels of chemicals such as hydroquinone, ammoniated mercury, borax, and hydrogen peroxide were rumoured to be used in skin bleach. Peiss, *Hope in a Jar,* pp.211-212

[274] Katherine Williams, "Betrayers of the Race," *Half-Century Magazine*, Vol.8, No.2, February 1920, p.3

[275] Peiss, *Hope in a Jar,* p.213

[276] Mrs Mary Vaughan quoted in Haidarali, *Brown Beauty,* p.89

[277] *Ibid.,* p.212

The Power of the Parlour

While acknowledging the complexity of hair straightening practices outlined above, it is essential to recognise that the beauty and haircare regimes conducted in beauty shops and domestic spaces formed a significant part of black culture during the early twentieth century. It was noted earlier that in order to more fully understand the decisions made by black women to engage in hair straightening practices, and to gain further insight into the complex articulations of race and beauty during these decades, it is important to locate the bodies of black women in the spaces and temporality in which they lived.[278] Sociologist Shirley Anne Tate has argued that the beauty practices popular within black communities are "given meaning and value within a Black aesthetic space," and this contention can be directly linked to experiences of the women engaged black beauty culture during the first half of the twentieth century.[279] In particular, it can be argued that the physical aesthetic of pressed hair held particular mnemonic meanings within an African-American communities; specifically, feelings of trust, comfort and nurturing, alongside engagement in black modernity which sprung from communal socialisation within environments such as the beauty shop.

It is also important to recognise the civic significance that social spaces such as the beauty parlour held within African-American communities across the United States. Julia Lucas, who ran a beauty salon linked to a barber shop in the black district of Durham, North Carolina, explained that: "we didn't have that many private places… that we could discuss… anything that concerned black people's advancement," and that within her salon, customers were able to speak their minds about black enfranchisement and civil rights because "they felt secure."[280] Recognising that spaces like the pool hall, the beauty salon and barbershop, as well as the Stanford L. Warren Library served an important purpose in the lives of Durham's working-class blacks, Lucas noted that: "a place does make a difference in how you express and when you feel free to express something that you know is controversial."[281] Black female beauticians therefore presided over important free spaces within black communities.[282] As a public space which mirrored the mothering nature of the domestic sphere, the beauty parlour,

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[278] Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women,* p.70
[279] Tate, *Black Beauty*, p.112
[280] Interview with Julia H. Lucas, interviewed by Leslie Brown in Durham (North Carolina), 21 September 1995, transcript p.19. *Behind the Veil: Documenting African-American Life in the Jim Crow South Digital Collection*, John Hope Franklin Research Center, Duke University Libraries. Transcript pp.1-53, available online via: https://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/media/pdf/behindtheveil/btvnc03020.pdf
[281] *Ibid.* p.31
[282] Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women*, p.58

alongside the beauty ritual itself, served as an emotional and psychological salve to the harsh realities of racial and gender prejudices that black women endured.[283] Importantly, within this space, black women could let off steam, relax, gossip, and be pampered in an environment free from their black husbands or white employers and the vociferous nature of a racially-ordered patriarchy.[284] Historian Blain Roberts agrees that "inside black beauty shops, rituals of beautification converged with rituals of socialisation," and that regular hair-pressing sessions provided moments of physical pleasure, self-indulgence, emotional connection, and sociability for black women.[285] Recognising that the beauty salon could provide women with respite from the harsh realities of Jim Crow, Madam C.J. Walker ensured that relaxation was central to Walker treatments, by instructing her agents to "secure absolute rest for the patron if she is to get the most beneficial results."[286]

Sensory dimensions of the social beautifying practice retain a fundamental place in the nostalgic descriptions of black beauty culture during the twentieth century.[287] Reflecting fondly on his own childhood, historian and literary scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. has spoken about how his mother set up shop in their family kitchen. Describing the smell of the hot combs heating up on the stove, he contends: "I liked what the smell meant for the shape of my day. There was an intimate warmth in the women's tones as they talked with my mama while she did their hair."[288] Acclaimed feminist theorist bell hooks has similarly recalled that as she and her five sisters sat in the kitchen while their mother did their hair, they enjoyed the "smells of burning grease and hair, mingled with the scent of our freshly washed bodies, with collard greens on the stove, with fried fish." For hooks, this Saturday haircare ritual was linked to acts of domestic nurture, alongside the memories of home-cooked food.[289] Indeed, hooks also deems this "ritual of black women's culture – of intimacy," as an important step to black womanhood, adding that she and her sisters were all eager to leave behind childhood braids and enter the adult world of pressed styles.[290] This association was shared by many black women, including Annabelle Baker, who recalled that as a young girl growing up in 1930s Florida, hair straightening was reserved for special occasions, and only when she

[283] *Ibid.* p.59
[284] Walker, *Style and Status*, p.62; and Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women*, p.58 and p.103
[285] Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women*, p.96
[286] *Ibid.* p.97
[287] *Ibid.* p.99
[288] Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Colored People: A Memoir*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) p.40-41; and Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women*, p.98
[289] Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women*, p.99
[290] *Ibid.*

turned thirteen was she allowed biweekly trips to the beauty parlour and deemed ready to stop wearing her hair braided.[291]

These testimonies reveal the sense of belonging and camaraderie that both the practice and entry onto the hair pressing chair denoted. Not partaking in this ritual, whether through choice or circumstance, could also render individuals an outsider within their own community. Singer Lena Horne for instance, whose naturally straight hair rendered the use of a straightening iron unnecessary, has explained that she "wanted so much to join in… it seemed a denial of my right to share in a group activity with my associates."[292] bell hooks, too, has noted that her own 'good hair' represented a barrier to intimacy, and she was thrilled when her mother let her join the Saturday ritual.[293] Although hooks later criticised hair straightening practices as an adherence to white beauty standards, she still believed that the ritual of hair pressing had afforded a moment of, both physical and emotional change to black women, and that the parlour was "a place where one could be comforted and one's spirit renewed."[294]

This sense of community and belonging associated with visiting the beauty parlour can also be linked to advertising rhetoric of beauty products used within the homes of black women. An early Poro advertisement, for instance, featured photographs of Madam Malone and a Mrs L.L. Roberts, demonstrating that their hair had grown past their shoulders and to Mrs Roberts' waist, alongside copy which read: "We grew our hair, now let us grow yours with Poro"[295] Noliwe M. Rooks points out that although the company was owned by Malone and no records indicate that Mrs Roberts was connected with creating the product, the use the words 'we' and 'us' was a strategy employed to not only highlight that Poro is owned and operated by an African-American woman, but to also speak to African-American women from a position of familiarity and kinship.[296] Moreover the use of 'Mrs,' in addition to the appropriation of the title 'Madame' by other companies, evoked a connection to a maternal, married and respectable woman.[297] It can be argued that such a strategy not only promoted feelings of trust and community away from the beauty parlour, but also alluded to traditional notions of respectability, and therefore highlights why so many women may have chosen to

[291] Annabelle Baker testimony quoted in Susannah Walker, *Style and Status*, p.77
[292] Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women*, p.98
[293] *Ibid.* p.99
[294] *Ibid.*
[295] *St Louis Palladium*, 1907
[296] Rooks, *Hair Raising,* p.48
[297] Haidarali, *Brown Beauty,* p.91

invest in these products. In addition, it is worth noting the value placed on black beauty culture during the early twentieth century, and the significant amount of time and money spent on haircare. The pressing system of shampooing, straightening and styling could take up to two hours, and as time-poor women this regular investment reveals the value placed on groomed hair. Susannah Walker agrees that regardless of economic situation, women would regularly spend a tenth or more of their weekly income on their hair, as "getting one's hair done was a source of pleasure and a way of asserting personal pride and independence. It was an essential precursor to a day in church or a night on the town."[298]

As noted above, beauty shops, whether located in commercial or domestic spaces, served as sites of civic and social importance within black communities; and also that the products themselves could foster a sense of belonging or camaraderie. Building on this contention, it can also be argued that large-scale commercial sites played a similar role within the community. After more than a decade with the ever successful *Poro,* Annie Malone founded *Poro College* in 1917, claiming that the College's main aim was to "contribute to the economic betterment of Race Women," and promote "personal neatness and pride, self-respect, [and] physical and mental cleanliness."[299] Housed in a three-story classical revival brick building on the corner of St Ferdinand and Pendleton Avenues in a St Louis neighbourhood known as the Ville, the strategic location of *Poro College* revealed Malone's middle-class concerns as well as her determination to make the institution a "constructive force in the development of the race."[300] Not only an educational training centre for *Poro* agents, the *College* also housed an array of facilities for the Ville's community. The building included dormitories, an employee cafeteria which also served the public, a roof garden for summer parties, a laundry, a bakery, a tailor shop, and an auditorium which doubled as a movie theatre and a space for performances by the *Poro* Symphony Orchestra and other black artists who did not want to perform in saloons or vaudeville theatres.[301] Malone also offered the auditorium to religious, fraternal, social and civic groups when it was not in use, and opened rooms to African-Americans traveling through St Louis, who would have been turned away from the city's white-only hotels.[302] From all angles the building offered amenities, as

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[298] Walker, *Style and Status*, p.78
[299] *Ibid.* p.41
[300] Ann Morris (ed.) 'Introduction,' *Lift Every Voice and Sing: St Louis African Americans in the Twentieth Century*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999) p.6; and Katharine T. Corbett, *In Her Place: A Guide to St. Louis Women's History*, (St Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1999) p.240
[301] Morris 'Introduction,' *Lift Every Voice and Sing,* p.6; and Corbett, *In Her Place,* p.240
[302] Corbett, *In Her Place,* p.240

storefronts on the Pendleton Avenue side of the College contained a barbershop, the *Poro* Ice Cream Parlor, and a millinery shop.[303] All-in-all *Poro College* was a significant space for black Missourians within the landscape of a segregated St Louis. Historian Katharine Corbett even claims that the College stimulated a knock-on effect for the development of the Ville neighbourhood. In 1920, blacks made up only 8 percent of the Ville's population; but by 1930, 86 percent of residents were African-American. These newcomers tended to be members of an emerging black middle-class eager to move west as poor migrants from the South crowded into older black neighbourhoods east of Grand Avenue.[304] Corbett contends that Malone's decision to promote *Poro College* as a cultural community centre contributed significantly to the Ville's emergence as an aspirational black middle-class neighbourhood.[305]

As with *Poro College*, the *Madam Walker Theatre* building in Indianapolis came to also symbolise racial uplift and progress within the city. Opened in 1927, it similarly contained a multitude of black businesses and service providers, including black doctors, dentists, beauticians, as well as a theatre which featured black performances. For black Indianapolis, the Walker building was a source of jobs, entertainment and racial dignity. Former Walker Company employee Jill Nelson later concurred that: "In the Walker building, black residents of Indianapolis could find their own doctors, dentists, drug store, fine restaurants, and of course a beauty salon specialising in the Walker system of beauty. For black Indianapolis, the Walker building was a mecca, a source of jobs, a source of pleasure, a source of pride."[306]

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[303] Morris 'Introduction,' *Lift Every Voice and Sing,* p.6
[304] Corbett, *In Her Place,* p.240
[305] *Ibid.*
[306] Jill Nelson interview for *Two Dollars and a Dream* documentary. Quote can be found at the 11:35 minute mark. *Two Dollars and A Dream*, directed and produced by Stanley Nelson (New York, NY: Filmmakers Library, 1989) 52 minutes. Accessed via: Alexander Street: A ProQuest Company. https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cvideo_work%7C1785149

Figure 5: The Walker Theatre Building, 1930s.
Indiana Historical Society, Digital Images Collection.

Both *Poro College* and the *Walker Theatre* were places to meet, sample the latest trends, and access resources usually denied within the segregated landscape of Jim Crow America. They were visual and tangible signifiers of black engagement in American consumerism and, to many, they symbolised black entrepreneurship and racial progress. By extension, so too did the Walker and Poro products, and the physical aesthetic gained from following their regimes, became associated with pride.

Alongside the maintenance of 'groomed hair' through the use of black haircare products, it can be argued that the purchasing of skin-altering cosmetics also signified an engagement with modern, middle-class consumerism, albeit in more complicated ways. While both Walker and Malone insisted throughout the 1910s that their companies would not sell skin bleaches, highlighting the distinction that they each made between hair pressing and face bleaching, during the 1920s attitudes towards such products shifted as both black- and white-owned cosmetic companies utilised the rhetoric of racial pride and New Negro uplift to market their skin bleach products. During her lifetime Madam Walker insisted that the Walker brand in no way promoted white emulation and refused to produce a skin bleach; after her death in 1919, however, came the production of "Tan-Off," which became one of

the Walker line's bestsellers during the 1920s.[307] Lauded as the "most effective bleach on the market today," the product was "recommended for brightening sallow or dark skin, for the treatment of tan, freckle, skin-blotch, and for clearing the complexion." By 1930, the company claimed that its agents were asked by customers to bleach their skin.[308] It is difficult to determine exactly what purpose such products were purchased for. As Kathy Peiss points out, women may have applied the bleach in various ways for various reasons: "Some dotted it on spots or blemishes to even the skin tone; others sought to fade or dissolve unwanted hair;

Figure 6: Madame C.J. Walker's 'Tan-Off' metal tin, *Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Object Number: 2011.177.2*

still others spread bleach across the entire face to peel off the darker epidermis and reveal the lighter layer below."[309] That a black-owned company produced and sold a 'bestseller' skin bleach to receptive African-American consumers, while touting race pride rhetoric, exposes the contradictory tensions at play and demonstrates that further consideration must be sought in order to determine how attitudes towards the manipulation of skin tone shifted throughout this period.

Reflecting on their time at the Walker Company in the 1989 documentary "Two Dollars and a Dream," former employees all concurred that the company and its products were deemed a source of pride within the community. A'Lelia Ransom Nelson, who was President of the Walker Company from 1953 to 1986, contended that: "the popular belief that Madame Walker only was out there selling hair grease to straighten black's hair to make

[307] Walker, *Style and Status*, p.65
[308] Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women,* p.77
[309] Peiss, *Hope in a Jar,* p.226

them look more white is totally false."[310] Another former employee Marjorie Joyner argued: "It was a method to beautify, rather than be thinking to turn somebody White or making them look like White."[311] An unidentified interviewee spoke of the racial pride that she believed Madame Walker instilled in African-Americans as Walker agents: "felt that she had done something for the race of women. They felt that she had given them an opportunity to make livings for themselves, which were different from the livings that most colored women had been able to make… They were making other colored women look beautiful."[312] Esther Hiedelberg concurred that "She just taught Black women to be proud of their selves so that they, in turn, could demand things that they couldn't have gotten otherwise if they didn't have a certain amount of pride attached to them."[313] With these contentions in mind, it is possible that for women living within communities in which Walker products were sold, the physical aesthetic that Walker clients displayed signified the, albeit limited, economic freedom, independence, and progress of African-American women.

Using the words of historian Deborah Thomas who has analysed Jamaican cultural identity, it can be contended that by engaging, appropriating, and re-signifying dominant Euro-American cultural practices, African-Americans aspired to a modernity of their own making within the context of their own communities.[314] By applying skin bleaching products, one could phenotypically adopt light brown skin without possessing or claiming white heritage; and by using hair straightening products African-Americans could create new styles and haircare practices unique to black culture at a time when black culture and identity was being redefined. Trying to separate the value placed on light skin and straight hair from the self-hate and internalised racism theory is problematic, especially when these features did adhere to white standards of beauty. While impossible to deny that many African-Americans did suffer and internalise damaging beliefs as a result of Euro-American standards, it must be recognised that additional motivations and understandings behind these practices existed.

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[310] A'Lelia Ransom Nelson interview for *Two Dollars and a Dream* documentary. Quote can be found at the 11:35 minute mark. *Two Dollars and A Dream*, directed and produced by Stanley Nelson (New York, NY: Filmmakers Library, 1989) 52 minutes. Accessed via: Alexander Street: A ProQuest Company. https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cvideo_work%7C1785149

[311] Marjorie Joyner interview for *Two Dollars and a Dream* documentary. Quote can be found at the 11:50 mark. *Two Dollars and A Dream*

[312] Unidentified participant interviewed during the *Two Dollars and a Dream* documentary. Quote can be found at the 16:00 minute mark. *Two Dollars and A Dream.*

[313] Esther Hiedelberg interview for the *Two Dollars and a Dream* documentary. Quote can be found at the 18:30 minute mark. *Two Dollars and A Dream*

[314] Thomas, *Modern Blackness,* p.8

While using products to reconfigure their bodies does suggest an adherence to white standards, simply reverting to the dominant narrative of race shame or self-hate ignores the fact that many of these people identified as black, lived within the black community, and spent their money in black businesses, all with faith in the notion that they were supporting the uplift of their race. In addition, so too did the real-life practical need to conform to this aesthetic in order to secure employment and advance economic opportunity. However misinformed or naïve these beliefs may be on reflection, or to twenty-first century scholars operating in the aftermath of the 1960's 'Black is Beautiful' cultural movement, it is nonetheless important to acknowledge the significance of these motivations within the cultural context of the early twentieth century. Whether through 9 to 5 passing or a genuine engagement in popular black cultural norms of the period, these reasons must be recognised.[315] Acknowledging individual agency and de-centring dominant understandings of the beauty practices employed by black women is therefore central to decolonizing beauty studies. While admittedly some may have chosen to appropriate styles that alluded to whiteness, it is possible that other African-Americans re-appropriated the cultural norms of white American society to create an identity which held a new meaning within an ever-evolving black space.

Looking beyond the dominant narrative can provide a greater understanding of how colourism really worked, and potentially reveal the multi-faceted reasons behind preferences of shade, ultimately exposing further insight into the lived experience and intra-racial dynamics of African-American communities in the urban North during the early twentieth century. It can also shed light on the experiences of mixed-race women who naturally embodied light brown skin, but were chastised because of their black-white heritage. In order to do this, it is necessary to examine the history of skin bleaching and chart how attitudes towards the manipulation of skin tone shifted across racial lines throughout this period.

The Pursuit of Golden-Brown Skin

The American skin bleaching market is today worth over $5.6 billion, but it was the social and political culture of the early-twentieth century which provided a particularly unique and receptive environment for this industry to flourish within African-American communities.[316] While evidence suggests that attempts to lighten the skin can be traced to enslaved

[315] Hobbs, *A Chosen Exile*, p.29, p.150, p.153 and p.172
[316] Kathy Russell-Cole, Midge Wilson and Ronald E. Hall, *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color in a New Millennium*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2013) p.71

communities of the nineteenth-century, who used lye, bleach and arsenic wafers to "get the dark out," it was not until the early-twentieth century that pharmaceutically-manufactured skin bleaching products became readily available on the consumer marketplace.[317] Indeed, the turn of the century marked a new era in African-American beauty practices, as well as the American cosmetic industry as a whole. In her seminal book *Hope in a Jar*, historian Kathy Peiss traces the social history of America's beauty culture and identified that while the 'painted woman' had previously denoted female vice, by the 1930s, makeup was instead considered a medium of self-expression in a consumer-based society where desired identities were now purchasable.[318] These shifting associations between female appearance and identity permeated all classes of American society, and transcended racial lines in a number of highly significant ways. It is particularly significant that the New Negro Movement took place alongside the growth in American consumerism and rise of the cosmetic industry, within the context of a deeply-engrained system of 'Jim Crow' segregation and racial hierarchy based on skin colour. Across racial lines, cosmetics became considered a medium of self-expression, and many believed that desired identities were now purchasable.[319]

Historically, pallor has served as a characteristic of feminine beauty, and a physical representation of social class.[320] From Japan and China to Europe and the United States, the common attitude to sun exposure prior to the twentieth century was to isolate one's self; and commitment to this stance can be evidenced in the popularity of protective fashion accessories such as gloves, wide-brimmed hats and parasols. The luxury of sun protection and pale skin was generally reserved for the upper classes, while members of the working class laboured outdoors and acquired a stigmatised tan. In an analysis of the history of sun tanning in the United States however, Yvonne Hunt et al have contended that the industrialisation of the American workforce during the late-nineteenth early to early twentieth century, set the stage for a gradual reversal of socially-constructed attitudes towards a tanned appearance.[321]

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[317] *Ibid.,* p.70
[318] Peiss, *Hope in a Jar,* pp.4-5
[319] *Ibid.*
[320] Yvonne Hunt, Eric Augustson, Lila Rutten, Richard Moser, and Amy Yaroch, 'History and Culture of Tanning in the United States,' in Carolyn J. Heckman and Sharon L. Manne's (eds.) *Shedding Light on Indoor Tanning*, (London: Springer, 2012) pp.7-8
[321] Hunt, Augustson, Rutten, Moser, and Yaroch, 'History and Culture of Tanning in the United States,' pp.10-11

Between 1880 and 1920 millions of Americas, of all races, left the rural countryside and moved into urban areas to gain employment in manufacturing and production factories. As factory work required working indoors for long hours away from sunlight, and as the cities congested slums were often heavily-polluted with coal smoke, pale skin soon became associated with the working class.[322] Physicians of the period cautioned of the dangers that "sunlight starvation" would have on the mind and body, warning that "diseases of darkness" such as tuberculosis and rickets ravaged the slums, in addition to diseases of "moral depravity" including alcoholism and depression.[323] No longer considered the epitome of health and high status, pallor was now the 'colour' of the poor and inept. It is within this climate that the sun tan developed into a symbol of upward mobility, as having a golden brown, tanned physique insinuated an affluent lifestyle with the ability to enjoy seaside vacations and outdoor recreation. Fashion and cosmetic industries were quick to capitalise on what Hunt et al refer to as "the vogue of the tan."[324] After returning from a vacation to the French Riviera with a dark suntan, for instance, fashion icon Coco Chanel declared in the pages of *Vogue* magazine that: "the 1929 girl must be tanned… a golden tan is the index of chic."[325] The number of articles and advertisements promoting tanning within popular women's magazines increased sharply during the late-1920s and early-1930s; and new shades of makeup were even introduced at cosmetics counters to accommodate the trend for sun-kissed skin. Devon Hansen Atchison credits additional factors with the rise in sun tanning, citing America's evolution from a producer to a consumer nation during the opening decades of the twentieth century as the most important reason.

It is pertinent to note however, that the prestige of a 'sun-kissed face and bronzed body' applied primarily to white Americans. Indeed, the popularity of sun tanning within white communities presents a seemingly contradictory issue; as the dark skin of African-Americans and other racial groups within the United States continued to be shunned.[326] Atchison asserts that as tanning grew to symbolise modernity, "skin became the place where the badge of modernity was worn;" but a similar argument can be made for the experience of

[322] *Ibid.,* p.10
[323] *Ibid.*
[324] The term "vogue of the tan" appeared in *Advertising and Selling* magazine in 1929, and is used in Hunt, Augustson, Rutten, Moser, and Yaroch, 'History and Culture of Tanning in the United States, p.16 and Devon Hansen Atchison, 'Shades of Change: Suntanning and the Interwar Years,' in Cheryl Krasnick Warsh and Dan Malleck's (eds.) *Consuming Modernity: Gendered Behaviour and Consumerism before the Baby Boom*, (The University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 2013) p.163
[325] Hunt, Augustson, Rutten, Moser, and Yaroch, 'History and Culture of Tanning in the United States, p.16
[326] Atchison, 'Shades of Change,' p.175

African-American women who chose to pharmaceutically or cosmetically lighten their skin.[327] More specifically, when the popularity of sun tanning in white communities is contrasted with that of skin bleaching within African-American, a striking parallel between modernity, consumerism and the newfound freedom of women emerges. As gaining a fashionable tan gave white women a mode of self-expression over the appearance of their bodies in ways that only fashion had before, so too did skin bleaching allow African-American women to reconfigure their identity.[328]

Alongside the maintenance of 'groomed hair' outlined above, the ability to manipulate and refashion one's identity through the purchasing of skin-altering cosmetics signified, across racial lines, an engagement with modern, middle-class consumerism. Whereas for white Americans, pale skin signified working indoors and an inability to pursue outdoor leisure activities, for African-Americans, a lighter skin tone symbolised a move away from toiling in the fields and darkening the skin, to a higher paid position that required one to be in an office all day. In contrasting ways, light brown skin signified the attainment of middle-class status.

While the experiences of white and black women similarly held a desire to attain a golden-brown appearance, it is important to note that this tone symbolised a desired lifestyle. For white women, tanning was not about insinuating a connection to 'blackness' or the African-American race, but instead about alluding to health and affluence. As Laila Haidarali points out, when the consumer marketplace filled with tanning products, accompanying advertising featured "brown-skinned Nubian princesses and Indian maidens," thus suggesting an allusion to mythologies of the exotic, remote, and colonised rather than the "lowly and local" African-American complexion.[329] For black women, it can be argued that skin bleaching was not about indicating 'whiteness,' but about the ability to "escape the vestiges of 'physical blackness,'" and take part in American modernity and consumerism.[330] Interestingly, allusions to the 'exotic' similarly permeated the advertising strategies of products marketed at black women, who cast Egyptian queens such as Cleopatra as a representation of 'brown beauty' and the heritage of African-descended women.

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[327] *Ibid.,* p.163
[328] *Ibid.,* p.174
[329] Haidarali, *Brown Beauty,* p.94
[330] Lindsey, 'Black No More,' p.102

As the field of American advertising evolved throughout this period, through the emergence of dedicated advertising firms, modernist graphic design and a growing recognition of the power of psychology, changes similarly reverberated within the black commercial media.[331] At the forefront of this transformation, Claude Barnett's promotion of the *Kashmir Chemical Company* revolutionised the advertising techniques of black-owned cosmetic companies.[332] Despite the growing consciousness of Africa fostered by Harlem creatives, advertisers found it difficult to craft visual images that acknowledged the African heritage of black Americans.[333] Indeed, it has been shown that New Negro 'race pride' rhetoric was often visually-articulated through the use of light-skinned African-American women with straight hair. Aware of these challenges, Barnett's advertising for "Nile Queen" skilfully negotiated an alternative image for the industry, by tapping into black intellectual

Figure 8: Nile Queen Preparations advertisement, Kashmir Chemical Co., *The Crisis*, March 1921

Figure 9: Nile Queen Preparations Advertisement, Kashmir Chemical Co., *The Crisis*, January 1920

[331] Peiss, *Hope in a Jar,* p.217
[332] *Ibid.,* p.217
[333] *Ibid.,* pp.217-220

debate surrounding Egypt and the African origins of Western civilisation. Using hieroglyphic symbols and featuring women with light brown skin and long wavy hair, Barnett configured a 'New Negro' phenotypical type that alluded to the cultural significance of Cleopatra as an ancient emblem of women's beauty.[334] That Barnett chose to engage with this particular character is significant, as debates surrounding her 'colour' abounded during the 1920s. Often portrayed as Mediterranean or Greek, the image of Cleopatra peaked at a time when the 'exotic' was fashionable among wealthy white America.[335] By reclaiming the racial identity of Cleopatra firmly within Africa however, Barnett asserted that as African descendants, African-American women inherited her legacy of beauty.[336] As white manufacturers assimilated dark skin to Spanish, Italian, or 'Oriental types,' Barnett drew on the contemporary penchant for exoticisation by integrating a vogueish image of Africa within the geography of female beauty.[337]

Historian Laila Haidarali has similarly addressed the importance of a brown skin hue in representations of New Negro womanhood.[338] Through an analysis of Du Bois' 1928 novel *Dark Princess,* Haidarali argues that by writing the love interest of his African-American protagonist as a brown, Asian Indian woman, Du Bois challenged class and colour-based parameters that helped define the era's gendered notions of race womanhood, thus highlighting the importance of colour as a visual and linguistic marker of race and suggesting that "brownness [was] a mutable racial marker."[339] 'Brown' was therefore a symbolic shade which was used in visual imaginings across the New Negro era and transcended traditional racial distinctions. In an effort to shed the associated remnants of enslavement, which characterised the history of African-Americans, such connections sought to unite the struggle

[334] Peiss, *Hope in a Jar,* p.220
[335] Debates continued into the 1930s following Cecil DeMille's 1934 film *Cleopatra* which featured the French-born, white American actress Claudette Colbert as the title character. Historian Denise Eileen McCoskey, has argued that commercial tie-ins were key, and the aim of the film was not to alienate its white female audience by reminding them of any racial-disparity between themselves and the Egyptian queen, but rather for them to identify with Cleopatra and then, through the purchase of gowns and 'style accessories,' continue this identification into their lives. Please see: Denise Eileen McCoskey, *Race: Antiquity and its Legacy*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2012) pp.12-13
[336] Peiss, *Hope in a Jar,* p.220
[337] *Ibid.,* pp.220-223
[338] Laila Soraya Haidarali, 'Browning the Dark Princess: Asian Indian Embodiment of 'New Negro Womanhood,' *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Volume 32, No. 1 (2012) pp.24-69
[339] *Ibid.,* p.25 and p.33

against white oppression with people of colour around the world, and can therefore be linked to the notion of 'colored cosmopolitanism.'[340]

The striking parallel of the desired 'tropical' sun tan within affluent white communities to the similarly 'exotic' Egyptian queen on products aimed at African-Americans reveals one underlying commonality: a desire to dissociate 'brownness' with the traditional, derogatory iterations of the African-American race which dominated American culture. It is here that the significance of mixed-race women who naturally embodied the aesthetic of light-brown skin comes into play. As popular imagery, which featured light brown skin as glamourous, exotic and desirable, sat alongside representations of mixed-race female bodies frequently typecast as promiscuous or degenerate, many people of mixed-race heritage chose to negotiate the physicality of their naturally brown skin by claiming a heritage more in-line with the cultural trends of the time.

Biracial Bodies

Over the course of the early twentieth century, visual representations of mixed-race female bodies were in flux. While the brown bodies of sun-kissed white Americans, and 'light, bright and beautiful' African-Americans permeated popular media, the bodies of those possessing black-white mixed-racial heritage remained contested. It has been shown that within the period of study, the literary, artistic and intellectual movement known as the New Negro, or Harlem, Renaissance sought to consciously reimagine and redefine black culture and black identity.[341] As leaders such as W.E.B. Du Bois struggled to "protect and project a positive image of blacks," African-American creatives worked in contrasting ways to counter the derogatory caricatures that dominated American culture by restructuring the *race's* image of *itself*.[342] The images produced by artists at the height of this movement, such as a series of paintings created by Archibald Motley, for instance, were central to larger conversations

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[340] For more information on the concept of 'Colored Cosmopolitanism,' please see Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012)

[341] While most historians agree that the Harlem Renaissance occurred during the 1920s and 1930s, some historians such as Treva Lindsey call for the periodisation of the era to be expanded to acknowledge the contributions of black women such as Fannie Barrier Williams and Anna Julia Cooper at the end of the nineteenth century. Treva B. Linsey, *Colored No More: Reinventing Black Womanhood in Washington D.C.*, pp.12-14

[342] Gates Jr., 'The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black,' pp.140-144; and Peiss, *Hope in a Jar,* pp.204-205

within African-American communities about how best to represent the race, and therefore provide a valuable insight into how the nuances of race were visually understood and articulated. While literary critics such as Cherene Sherrard-Johnson have analysed Archibald Motley's art alongside literary texts such a Nella Larsen's *Passing*, Jessie Fauset's *Plum* Bun, and Jean Toomer's *Cane*, the way in which visual art complicated the landscape for mixed-race bodies to exist in reality, has been overlooked.[343] In particular, an analysis of how visual culture related to not only the beauty industry but also the personal negotiation of mixed-race physical attributes, has not yet been attempted.

Born in New Orleans in 1891, Motley's ancestors included individuals of African-American, European, Creole, and Native American descent. Art scholar Amy Mooney, has highlighted that these multiracial Louisianan roots and middle-class status all fostered in Motley an acute awareness of the social and economic constraints that skin tone implicated.[344] During Motley's formative years, art academies across the United States were incorporating pseudosciences such as phrenology and physiognomy into their portraiture and life drawing classes.[345] The stereotypes shaped by contemporary pseudosciences arguably influenced Motley's understanding of the intersections of race, phenotypical features, and innate behaviour.[346] This is particularly evident in a series of portraits produced by Motely during the 1920s which appear to reinforce popular stereotypes about women of mixed-race descent.[347] Two of the portraits created to explore the miscegenation theme were entitled 'The Octoroon' (1925), and 'The Mulatress' (1924), and each featured a woman of mixed-racial descent (See Fig.10 and Fig.11).[348] It is noteworthy that Motley used the Creole classifications 'Mulatress' and 'Octoroon,' especially as he deemed these portraits "not only an artistic venture, but also a scientific problem."[349] Such titles hint at Motley's belief that an individual's physical and innate-psychological characteristics influenced their social standing.

[343] Sherrard-Johnson, *Portraits of the New Negro Woman,*
[344] Amy M. Mooney, 'Representing Race: Disjunctures in the Work of Archibald J. Motley, Jr.,' *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2, (1999) p.164
[345] Phrenology was concerned with studying the shape and protuberances of the human skull to determine character and mental capacity, while physiognomy involved judging character on the basis of facial and bodily features. Mooney, 'Representing Race,' p.166
[346] *Ibid.,* p.167
[347] *Ibid.,* p.164
[348] Sherrard-Johnson '"A Plea for Color:"' p.833
[349] Mooney, 'Representing Race,' p.168

Figure 10: Archibald Motley, *The Octoroon Girl,* 1925

Figure 11: Archibald Motley, *The Mulatress*, 1924

When displayed side-by-side, the subtle differences between the two sitters, as a result of their varying 'blood quantum,' are laid bare. They are both posed off-centre and leaning to the left with their hands visible. The 'Octoroon's' left hand displays a diamond engagement ring symbolising wealth and that she has attained a secure partner, which stands in stark contrast to the lack of engagement ring in the 'Mulatress' painting. While both women sport the fashionable bob-hairstyle archetypal of the 1920s, in itself a symbol of female emancipation from the constraints of Victorian womanhood, Motley's choice of clothing for each of his subjects suggests that they each lived opposing lifestyles. The 'Mulatress' wears a sleeveless flapper-style dress while the 'Octoroon' is modestly dressed and holding a pair of leather gloves, again a symbol of wealth. By subtly emphasising the economic disparity between the sitters, Motley suggested that affluence, beauty and sophistication increased as the skin lightened and 'Negro blood quantum' decreased. Although Motley aimed to counter derogative images of African-Americans, he instead reinforced well-engrained stereotypes about mixed-race women of black-white descent. The physical features of the two sitters for instance reveal Motley's understanding of the biological underpinnings of race, genealogy and personality type. Writing years later, Motley claimed: "I have seen Octoroons with skin as white as people from Northern Europe; with blonde straight hair, blue eyes, sharp well-

proportioned features and extremely thin lips."[350] He added that: "the head is normally and well-constructed and symmetrically balanced," an assessment that adhered to contemporary understandings of phrenology. Moreover with the 'Mulatress' painting, Motley explained that he had intended to 'express the true Mulatress,' but it would appear that in doing so he adhered to the 'tragic Mulatto' stereotype. Physically, the 'Mulatress' has a slightly wider nose and definite curl to her hair than the 'Octoroon,' signalling her closer biological proximity to African heritage. Taking Motley's educational background and knowledge of physiognomic texts into consideration, art scholar Amy Mooney has observed that the "severe, jutting angle of the model's chin and firm set of her mouth," may mean that Motley understood these qualities to indicate a defiant, selfish, and vindictive disposition.[351] Even the posture of the sitters reinforces the perceived disparity of refinement as the 'Octoroon' sits elegantly poised, while the slouched and slightly-scornful gaze of the 'Mulatress' is discouraging.

Although intended to dispel old stereotypes about African-American women by capturing the dignity and achievements of sitters, Motley's visual interpretation of the gradations of mixed black-white heritage instead reinforced the precise assumptions that members of the New Negro movement were trying to counter.[352] In particular, Motley emphasised the economic disparity between his sitters and suggested that beauty and refinement increased as their skin lightened. While this tone is strikingly similar to the sentiments expressed in skin bleaching beauty advertisements of the period, the key difference lies in the suggestion that Motley's visual imagining of a prosperous, light-brown body is directly linked to the sitter's proximity to white heritage. In contrast, black-owned organisations such as the *Kashmir Chemical Company* connected the glamourous light-brown bodies of their advertisements to the beauty of the 'Nile Queen,' Cleopatra. The beauty of light-brown African-American women, was thus associated with the heritage and historic birth-right of African-descended women.

This observation is significant, as it underscores the extent to which common imaginings of light-brown and mixed-race female bodies were highly-contested and intrinsically-bound to visual narratives of the 1920s.[353] Moreover, it highlights the multitude

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[350] *Ibid.* pp.168-169
[351] *Ibid.* p.169
[352] *Ibid.* p.164
[353] Sherrard-Johnson argues a very similar point in the following analysis. Sherrard-Johnson, '"A Plea for Color:" Nella Larsen's Iconography of the Mulatta,' p.836

of contradictory messages that women of mixed-racial heritage, and who naturally embodied the light-brown skin so heavily scrutinised in visual media of the period, had to grapple with. Indeed, within the visual advertising of products upheld within black communities as a means to racial uplift and pride, the beauty of light brown bodies were frequently located in the beauty traditions of Africa, India, and Native America, distanced from the damaging history of black enslavement within the Americas and associations of white-on-black sexual exploitation.

The 'exoticisation' of non-Euro-American features in beauty advertisements is highly significant, as it can be linked to the way in which mixed-race women negotiated their physical attributes to construct a more advantageous or accepted racial identity within the contested cultural context outlined above. In 1925, Walter White noted a propensity of mixed-race women attributing their features to French, Spanish or Cuban heritage.[354] Considering that cosmetic advertisements exoticised the light-skinned female body, this attribution can be linked to the racial identity negotiation of mixed-race women who aimed to escape stigmatisation based on physiognomic associations. Writing in the 1920s Marcus Garvey was outspoken in his disdain for mixed-race individuals of black-white descent, associating their racial intermixture with either the violation of black women or the hypocritical violence perpetrated against black men for interracial relations. In his 1927 poem "The Tragedy of White Injustice" for instance, he expressed fury at the rape of black women by white men, naming the resulting mixed-race children "shameful" "hybrids and mongrels"[355] During an interview in 1937 ex-slave Jane Smith Hill Harmon expressed absolute hate towards light-skinned or mixed-race African-American: "An' as fuh yaller niggers – huh! I jes' hates 'em – dey's de wust niggers de're is, dey's got dirty feets, an' dey's nasty an' mean, I hates 'em, I tells yuh!"[356] Linking this prejudice to her own recollection of enslavement, Mom Ryer Emmanuel detailed the prejudice that her former mistress imparted on a mixed-race child believed to be her husband's illegitimate daughter:

> "All de other chillum was black skin wid dis here kinky hair en she was yellow skin wid right straight hair. My Lord, old Missus been mighty

[354] Walter White, 'The Paradox of Color,' in Alain Locke's (ed.) *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* (New York, First Touchstone Edition, 1925; 1997) p.364
[355] Marcus Garvey, *The Tragedy of White Injustice*, (London: Black Classic Press, 1927; 1935)
[356] Interview with Jane Smith Hill Harmon, 1937. Interviewed by Minnie Branham Stonestreet in Washington-Wilkes, Georgia. *Slave Narratives, A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves.* Georgia Narratives, volume iv, part 2, pp.98-102

> proud of her black chillum, but she sho been touches bout dat yellow one. I remember, all us chillum was playing round bout de step one day whe' Miss Ross was settin en she ax dat yellow child, say, 'Who your papa?' De child never know no better en she tell her right out exactly de one her mammy had tell her was her papa. Lord, Miss Ross, she say, 'Well, get off my step. Get off en stay off dere cause you don' noways belong to me.' De poor child, she cry en she cry so hard till her mammy never know what to do. She take en grease her en black her all over wid smut, but she couldn' never trouble dat straight hair off her noway. Dat how–come dere so much different classes today, I say. Yes, mam, dat whe' dat old stain come from."[357]

Taking such accounts into consideration, it can therefore be asserted that within certain African-American communities, light-skin and straight hair symbolised the painful history of sexual exploitation, the "old stain" as Mom Ryer Emmanuel termed it, and that people of mixed black-white descent were shunned due to perceptions of what they physically-embodied.[358] Therefore, many men and women of mixed-racial heritage attempted to negotiate a desirable racial identity more in line with personal experience, affiliations, and aspirations.

W.E.B. DuBois' renowned "Double Consciousness" theory is a useful way to further explore the reasons why many people of mixed black-white heritage negotiated their identity by claiming an alternative heritage. DuBois argues that African-Americans are forever conscious of their separate identities as Americans and as 'coloured' individuals, stating in 1903: "One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body."[359] This idea of a "dark body," which DuBois reductively casts as male, can be complicated when metaphorically 'lightened' to attribute for the experience of mixed-race women. The prestige attached to evoking an alternative ancestry, outside of white-European, could therefore signify a 'conscious' negotiation of racial identity in order to reconcile the "unreconciled strivings" allegedly present in people of mixed-racial descent. This negotiation had the potential to prevent

[357] Interview with Mom Ryer Emmanuel, December 16 1937. Interviewed by Annie Ruth Davis in Marion, South Carolina. *Slave Narratives, A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves.* South Carolina Narratives, vol. xiv, part 2. p.14
[358] For further discussion of the contempt within African-American communities towards mixed-race people with black-white heritage please see Davis, *Who is Black?*, pp.57-58 and pp.134-139
[359] W.E.B DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (New York, Dover Publications, 1903; 1994) p.2

mixed-race individuals from being ostracised from African-American communities that derided their physical features, and instead forge a unique position based on their own conception of racial identity.

A popular technique in the negotiation of racial identity, was to attribute ones appearance to Native American heritage. The lore of African-American families incorporating Native ancestry into their genealogy was observed in 1928, when African-American journalist and author Zora Neale Hurston assisted anthropologist Melville Herskovits in a genealogical study of 1511 African-American students at Howard University.[360] Herskovits and Hurston concluded that 27.2 percent of participants claimed Native American ancestry, and that subsequent adjustments had to be made for the "distinct prestige value" of claiming such heritage.[361] The prestige attached to claiming Native American heritage arguably lay in historic racialised-conceptions of sexual coercion and consent. Historian Fay Yarbrough has argued that many ex-slaves associated relationships between blacks and whites as coercive, due to the reality of rape within enslaved communities; whereas relationships between blacks and Native Americans were widely-perceived to be consensual.[362] Many ex-slave testimonies conveyed sentiments that: "immoral white men have, by force, injected their blood into our veins," while very few referenced negative black-Native relations.[363] Historian Gary Nash has identified that black-Native relationships were deemed consensual because Native American men were rarely caricatured as frenzied rapists, but instead portrayed as hostile, yet sexually-passive, savages.[364] While intentionally created by whites to contrast the illusory image of the black male rapist, it could therefore be reasoned that this 'sexually-passive' Indian permeated enslaved communities and instead contrasted the, very real, white master rapist.[365]

Anthropologist Nina Jablonski recently concurred that: "having a Native American in one's background is ennobling and elevating, but having physical traits associated with

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[360] Laura Lovett, 'African and Cherokee by Choice: Race and Resistance under Legalised Segregation,' James F. Brooks, *Confounding the Color Line: The Indian-Black Experience in North America* (Nebraska, 2002) p.192
[361] *Ibid.*
[362] Fay Yarbrough, *Race and the Cherokee Nation: Sovereignty in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008) p.123
[363] For specific examples of the cruelty of slaveholders within the Cherokee and Creek Nations, please see: Yarbrough, *Race and the Cherokee Nation,* p.113
[364] Gary Nash, *Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early America*, (New Jersey, Prentice Hall 1974), p.288
[365] *Ibid.*

European subjugation is not."[366] Many among the formerly enslaved and their descendants evidenced their shame in the coercive nature of some mixed-race ancestry and their discomfort in claiming a mixed-race heritage related to white people, by designating their light skin and straight hair to possessing part Native American genealogy instead. [367] For instance, during a WPA interview in 1937, ex-slave Mandy Jones from Mississippi recalled that: "When my granny walked along de road, all dem Africans say, 'What a fine lookin' woman.' She had hair down to her shoulders, an' was a yaller woman, dey say she was kin to de Injuns."[368] While she may truly have been of Native American descent, Jones' narrative must be considered alongside the narratives of other individuals such as Charlie Davenport who expressed shame in both parts of his racial heritage, and Annie Wallace who lied about her racial background. Ex-slave Davenport from Mississippi claimed: "I's part Injun. I aint got no Nigger nose an' my hair is so long so I has to keep it wropped."[369] Here, Davenport placed his physical features in direct contrast to those derogatively associated with African-Americans, suggesting a desire to separate himself from being defined as fully African-American. He demonstrated pride that these physical features did not conform to phenotypical 'Negroid' features while also implying that he did not have white heritage. While Davenport may indeed be of black-Native descent, and not shunning a white heritage, he nonetheless expressed a racial identity other than the strict binary of black-white identification. As Annie Wallace gave her testimony, an interviewer noted that she appeared to be mixed-race and Wallace designated her light complexion to Native American heritage.[370] However, Wallace's son later informed the interviewer that his mother was actually "half-white," but ashamed to admit so because of the painful connotations associated with black-white heritage.[371]

This 'shame' of possessing white-American ancestry can be used to support the contention that physical features were consciously negotiated and exoticised by mixed-race Americans to evade undesirable associations and reconfigure a new identity. When

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[366] Quoted in: Henry Louis Gates Jr., 'High Cheekbones and Straight Black Hair? Why Most Black People aren't 'Part-Indian' despite Family Lore,' *The Root*, April 21 2014 http://www.theroot.com/articles/history/2014/04/why_most_black_people_aren_t_part_indian.html

[367] Lovett, 'African and Cherokee by Choice,' p.195

[368] Interview with Mandy Jones, 1937. Interviewer unknown, transcribed by Ann Allen Geoghegan. Mississippi Narratives, WPA Slave Narrative Project, vol. 8, p.32. Federal Writer's Project, United States Works Progress Administration, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

[369] Interview with Charlie Davenport, 1937. Interviewed by Edith Wyatt Moore. Mississippi Narratives, WPA Slave Narrative Project, vol. 9, pp.33-36.

[370] Young, 'Exploring the WPA Narratives,' pp.65-66

[371] *Ibid.,* pp.65-66

interviewed in 1977, education specialist Lucy Miller Mitchel recounted her experience of this attitude while attending high school in Daytona, Florida. She recalled that "there was a predominance of dark skinned students who used to badger me with the phrase, 'Black is honest,'" and although initially puzzled by the phrase, her mother explained that "there were some families that had white fathers and grandfathers and that reflected in the skin color of the children," and so the phrase 'Black is honest' insinuated that one was illegitimate because of the light shade of skin.[372] While Mitchells' parents were married, and she was 'legitimate,' this experience clearly affected her experience as a young, light-skinned woman, growing up within a Floridian African-American community. Despite a history of 'blue vein societies,' mulatto elites and the notion that white heritage was better, the narratives given by ex-slaves in the 1930s highlights the conscious attempt by African-Americans of all degrees of racial heritage to consciously refashion their identity during the early-twentieth century.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the idealised light brown skin and 'well-groomed' hair of the New Negro woman, whose image dominated African-American visual culture over the course of the 1920s, signalled a move away from the values of historic 'blue vein' societies which privileged the 'whiteness' of mixed-race heritage, and instead embodied a new meaning, unique to the context of the early-twentieth century. Despite the health risks associated with the use of appearance-altering products, cosmetics came to represent the refashioning of the female-self, and were marketed in ways which suggested a powerful opportunity to escape the horrors of racial discrimination, and signified active participation in American consumerism and urban modernity. Factors such as New Negro intellectual discourse, visual media, and the rise of consumerism all intersected in ways which influenced the beauty practices of African-American women. Organisations such as the Walker Company invested in racial uplift and the 'politics of respectability' to ensure that their products were associated with racial pride, uplift and progress. While the ability to purchase cosmetic products, such as skin bleach and hair straightening preparations, represented a form of consumer citizenship, demonstrating this engagement by physically using the products signified, to many, the economic freedom of urban African-American women.[373]

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[372] Lucy Miller Mitchell, *Black Women Oral History Project*, interview conducted by Cheryl Gilkes, June 17 and 24, 1977; and July 1, 6, and 25, 1977 (Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.) pp.83-84

[373] Wolf, *The Beauty Myth,* p.12

Furthermore, as cultural ties to Africa and the notion of 'colored cosmopolitanism' were being explored by black intellectuals and creatives throughout the period, it was be shown that products marketed at African-American consumers used the lore of brown figures such as Cleopatra to assert that African-American women had a rightful claim to her legacy of beauty.[374] The visual images produced by mixed-race artists, such as Archibald Motely, at the height of the Harlem Renaissance provide a valuable insight into how the nuances of race were visually understood and articulated by black creatives. That such imagery reinforced stereotypes about racial mixture, and the notion that closer proximity to white heritage awarded greater social gains, emphasised the cultural landscape that women of mixed-racial heritage had to grapple with.

This chapter has laid the foundations for the next two chapters, by exploring the social and cultural landscape that the women whose lives will be examined existed within. The ramifications of such prejudices towards people of black-white racial mixture, and subsequent decisions to exoticise mixed-race bodies on American soil, can be found in the decades following the 1920s. It will be shown in Chapter Two, for instance, that the light-skinned Anita Thompson Reynolds preferred to identify as "café au lait," after experiencing more tolerance and an ease of life in France. In 1928, no longer under the "black and white flag" in America and "away from the polarization," Reynolds found that the "cocktails" or people of mixed-racial heritage were often held in high regard by French society.[375] As a dancer and actor living in the United States, however, Reynolds was frequently cast in 'exotic' roles, and at one point had to 'pass' as Mexican in order to 'explain' her brown skin, and took on the pseudonym Matelle to "play the part more fully."[376] Moreover, Reynolds's experience can be linked to that of Philippa Schuyler, whose life will be explored in Chapter Three. As the biracial daughter of George and Josephine Schuyler, Philippa's early life was characterised by her fame as a child prodigy. Upheld as a rebuttal to fears regarding the offspring of interracial couples in her youth, as Philippa transitioned to adulthood she lost the ability to symbolise a harmless "bridge between the races," because no adult equivalent

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[374] Peiss, *Hope in a Jar,* p.220
[375] Oral recording of Anita Thompson Dickinson Reynolds, Chess Has No Princess – Tape 1, May 1, 1980. Anita Thompson Dickinson Reynolds Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 129-15; and Anita Thompson Dickinson Reynolds, *American Cocktail: A 'Colored Girl' in the World*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014) p.113 and pp.117-118
[376] Reynolds, *American Cocktail*, p.86

existed within the public sphere for the space she occupied as a biracial child.[377] While both black and white America shifted her into the 'Negro' category, Philippa resisted this classification, and instead crafted an identity which more accurately matched her understanding of her own heritage. Rejecting her black-white biracial identity, and distancing herself from any suggestion that she was the daughter of an 'American Negro,' by 1960, Philippa decided to pass full-time as an 'Iberian' named Felipa Monterro y Schuyler.[378] Explaining her decision in a 1963 letter to her mother, Philippa maintained that: "I had 30 miserable years in the USA because of having the taint of being a 'strange curiosity' applied to me, and I sure don't want to… have 30 more miserable years."[379]

As part of the refashioning of her racial identity, Philippa not only rejected her father's African ancestry but she also distanced herself from her mother's whiteness and invented a 'Latin' background for Josephine in order to become 'off-white.'[380] In one autobiographical essay, she claimed that "through my father, a New York editor, I am Malagasy, Native American, Portuguese and Dutch. Through my mother, a writer from Texas, I am Latino and Anglo-Saxon."[381] Philippa has been charged by scholars with anti-black sentiment and self-hatred but, as Chapter Three will conclude, it could be argued that crafting a more desirable 'exotic' identity which lay outside the black-white binary, was one way for a woman occupying a biracial body to negotiate the hostile and racially-segregated environment of the United States. The racial identity that Philippa Schuyler's crafted provided her with the resources necessary to be successful, and to protect her professional status as a pianist, within the context of a hostile, segregated society. Schuyler selected the aspects of her mixed-racial heritage which she not only felt an affinity with, but were socially advantageous to claim within the given context.

This chapter has therefore gone some way to contextualise the decisions made by women of colour to make sense of and situate their bodies within the landscape of ever-

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[377] Kathryn Talalay, *Composition in Black and White: The Tragic Saga of Harlem's Biracial Prodigy: The Life of Philippa Schuyler*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.50; Deems Taylor, 'Foreword,' in Philippa Duke Schuyler, *Adventures in Black and White*, p.xii; and Streeter, *Tragic No More*, pp.106-107 and p.120

[378] Streeter, *Tragic No More*, p.120; and Daniel McNeil, *Sex and Race in the Black Atlantic: Mulatto Devils and Multiracial Messiahs*, (New York: Routledge, 2010) pp.38-39

[379] Philippa Schuyler to Josephine Schuyler, 16 May 1963. Schuyler Family Collection Schuyler Family Collection. Schomburg Centre for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, New York. Sc MG 63. Also quoted in: McNeil, *Sex and Race in the Black Atlantic,* p.38

[380] McNeil, *Sex and Race in the Black Atlantic,* p.39

[381] Philippa Schuyler, 'Une Metisse a la Recherche de Son Ame,' translated from French by Paul M.M. Cooper (2016). Philippa Duke Schuyler Series, Schuyler Family Collection. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, MG63 Box 61 Folder 4, p.1

changing racialised standards of beauty. The next chapter will explore how women of mixed-racial heritage articulated their lived experience, and responded to perceptions of mixed-racial identity which permeated the black-white colour line.

Chapter 2

“Within my Warring Blood:”

Articulating the Mixed-Race Experience

"It seems but fair and just now some of the neglected light-skinned colored people… rise up and speak."[382]

Taking inspiration from the above quote by Alice Dunbar-Nelson, this chapter will examine the ways in which women of mixed-racial heritage understood and negotiated their racial identities during the early twentieth century. While the Introduction outlined how white eugenicists and black nationalists debated the dangers and degeneracy of 'hybrids,' and Chapter One explored various ways that mixed-race and biracial female bodies were understood and negotiated across the period with a focus on aesthetics, the central aim of this chapter will reveal how mixed-race women positioned themselves within the context of dominant cultural, sociological and scientific ideas about racial mixture. By analysing the autobiographical writings of Anita Thompson Dickinson Reynolds, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, and Zora Neale Hurston it will be shown that some mixed-race women actively reacted and responded to the perceived psychological implications of their mixed-racial identity. Each of these women spoke to their experiences as light-skinned African-American women in ways that demonstrated not only their encounters with white racism but also intra-racial colourism.

In addition to autobiographical texts, the second part of this chapter will explore the creative works by women of mixed-racial heritage in response to cultural stereotypes. This section will complicate the 'tragic mulatto' convention which has dominated historiographical analysis, by revealing that these women actively responded to misrepresentations of mixed-race women through a variety of techniques. It will build on the work of Eve Raimon, Teresa Zackodnik, Hazel Carby, and Rainier Spencer, whose analyses of the 'tragic mulatta' trope was explored in the introductory chapter.[383] It has been shown that these literary critics highlighted, among other things, that during the 1920s female writers such as Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen employed the 'tragic mulatta' trope as a form of social commentary to critique societal expectations around issues of class, intra-racial gender dynamics, and the rhetorical discourse of the 'New Negro' cultural moment. However, such analyses tend to homogenise the work of African-American female writers

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[382] Dunbar-Nelson, 'Brass Ankles Speaks,' p.311

[383] Raimon, *The Tragic Mulatta Revisited;* Zackodnik, *The Mulatta and the Politics of Race*; Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*; and Spencer, *Reproducing Race*

into that of the broad New Negro and Harlem Renaissance literary scene, and therefore fall short of interrogating the significance of these writers' mixed-racial heritage. This chapter will therefore address this shortcoming and focus solely on the words and perspective of mixed-race women. By exploring the ways in which such women situated themselves within the racial and gendered social systems of 1920s and 1930s America, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the extent of agency these women possessed both within their own race and also more widely within the American nation. By creating narratives that address the hierarchies of colour and the existence of mixed-race Americans, their work challenged the notion of homogeneity within African-American communities, thus revealing a broader understanding of how these communities functioned during the early twentieth century. It also reveals that physically embodying the legacy of a mixed-race ancestry led to differing, but nonetheless important, experiences both within local African-American communities and the wider American society.

The work of Dunbar-Nelson and Hurston in particular will be analysed alongside that of Georgia Douglas Johnson. While novel-length prose will be appraised, this chapter will focus more intently on the poems and playscripts of these women. As shorter works of literature were more easily distributed and therefore more widely-read by broader sectors of the African-American community, the more concise form of these authors' plays and articles were arguably an ideal forum to encourage community debate on controversial issues as they evolved. These texts provided their mixed-race authors an effective way to articulate their lived experience of how notions of colour and heritage impacted their lives. In a climate of both racial and gender subjugation, when violent reprisals met those who transgressed societal expectations, women of African-American descent had very clear parameters about what could and could not be said. Restricted by the 'politics of representation' and middle-class notions of respectability, as well as the very real danger to life, creative endeavours enabled women to speak out under the relative safety of fiction. That these women chose to articulate their thoughts, whether explicitly or with veiled candour, within such a precarious environment, is significant, especially as black women's voices were historically marginalised in the public sphere.

The women examined throughout this chapter have been selected for a number of reasons. To begin, each woman left testimony, in one way or another, which commented on existing as a mixed-race woman in their particular moment in time. Alice Dunbar-Nelson and Georgia Douglas Johnson were born in the last decades of the nineteenth-century, 1875 and

1880 respectively, meaning that they witnessed the emergence of a turn-of-the-century black literary tradition which challenged dominant stereotypes surrounding black female, sexuality, domesticity and motherhood.[384] As part of this initiative, the National Association of Coloured Women's Clubs (NACWC) was founded in 1896 under the mantra "Lifting as we Climb," and similarly marked an increased effort towards reconceptualising black women's unique experience and role within the African-American community.[385] While Zora Neale Hurston and Anita Reynolds were born in 1891 and 1901 respectively, and were too young to experience the turn-of-the-century shifts that Dunbar-Nelson and Johnson faced, they nonetheless would have felt its forces; and having lived through the opening decades of the twentieth century would have witnessed the racial violence, eugenicist rhetoric and cultural reconfigurations that characterised these years. Of particular importance is the fact that each of these women were writing during the New Negro Renaissance, a time when notions of race, gender, hybridity, and sexuality were being reconfigured. By exploring the years spanning the New Negro Renaissance through the eyes of mixed-race women, and placing their words in conversation with each other, this chapter will offer a new perspective on this well-examined cultural and artistic movement.

Addressing the Silence

Although the main aim of this chapter is to compare how these women personally and creatively expressed themselves during this period, the full fabric of these women's lives cannot be wholly examined. Anita Reynolds did not produce creative works, and Johnson's personal testimony has been lost to the historical record. Rather than discard these women from the study, it will be shown that their surviving words are still significant and that when placed alongside the expressions of other mixed-race women, a richer representation of mixed-racial identity can be revealed. The methodological issue of historical evidence, or lack thereof, within the field of black women's history has been at the forefront of scholarship since the 1980s.[386] Caught in the double bind of racial and gender subjugation, it has been well documented that black women's presence within the archive has been

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[384] Feimster, *Southern Horrors,* p.165

[385] Mitchell, *Living with Lynching,* p.29; and Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, p.108 and pp.180-181

[386] For instance, please see: Deborah Gray White, "Mining the Forgotten: Manuscript Sources for Black Women's History," *Journal of American History,* 74, no.1 (June 1987) pp.237–42; Jacqueline Jones*, Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985;2010)

discarded in favour of white, male voices.[387] In response to this historical silencing, Ashley Farmer points out that for the past three decades historians have worked to 'mine the forgotten' voices of black women and render them audible.[388] In more recent years, however, Farmer argues that historians have become less invested in "rescuing" black women from their "invisibility," and have instead turned their attention to "acknowledging and interrogating issues of empowerment and erasure embedded in the archive itself."[389] Citing Marisa Fuentes's work on enslaved Barbadian women, Farmer highlights the ways in which historians challenge the presumption that the absence of documentation renders enslaved women's experiences unrecoverable.[390]

In her own words, Fuentes explains that her research "examines archival fragments in order to understand how these documents shape the meaning produced about them in their own time,"[391] and that by "filling out minuscule fragmentary mentions or the absence of evidence with spatial and historical context our historical interpretation [can] shift to the enslaved viewpoint in important ways."[392] Fuentes investigates the lives of enslaved women like Jane, who materialises briefly in a runaway advertisement and who, in only few sentences, is depicted in the way her owner wanted the public to know about her. The advertisement reduces Jane to her distinguishable scars: "country marks in [sic] her forehead and a firebrand on one of her breasts, likewise a large mark of her country behind her shoulder almost to the small of her back, and a [stab] of a knife in her neck."[393] However, Fuentes explains that the scars etched on enslaved bodies signified different meanings for various groups of people within Barbados slave society, whether that be as evidence as punishment, a source of terror or confirmation of captivity, this "body memory" also transferred knowledge of enslavement to future generations.[394] Fuentes argues that even with this "scant accounting" of Jane's life, through the close reading of scarred enslaved bodies in runaway advertisements and application of historical context, historians can ascertain the language she spoke, her probable ethnic origins, her past experience with violence, and can

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[387] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, 'Beyond the Sound of Silence: Afro-American Women in History,' *Gender & History*, Vol.1 No.1 (1989) pp.50-67
[388] Ashley D. Farmer, 'Into the Stacks: In Search of the Black Women's History Archive,' *Modern American History,* Vol. 1, No.2 (2018), pp.289-293
[389] *Ibid.* p.289
[390] *Ibid.* p.290
[391] Marisa Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016) p.2
[392] *Ibid.* p.4
[393] *Ibid.* p.13
[394] *Ibid.* p.16

even construct a "topography" of Jane's enslavement and escape.[395] Historian Stephanie Camp agrees, attesting that regardless of whether the surviving documentary evidence we have "remains in shards or in linear feet," historians can "employ the imagination, closely reading … documents in their context and speculating about their meanings."[396]

The way in which Johnson's words were lost epitomises the lack of value placed on preserving black women's archives and, as a result, their voices. Recounting the day of Johnson's funeral in 1966, poet and playwright Owen Dodson recalled that a wealth of her written material was disposed of: "I do know that she had a great deal of unpublished material – novels, poems, essays, memoirs, remembrances, all kinds of things. But as the car stopped in front of her house, the men were clearing out the cellar, and I clearly saw manuscripts thrown into the garbage."[397] In a tale that is all too common regarding women of colour across the globe, Johnson's race and gender meant her records were literally disposed of as unimportant and without significance, a process which subsequently hindered scholarly recognition after her death. While it is regrettable that Johnson's work was not considered worthy of preservation, the material which did survive nonetheless provides a valuable insight into the ways in which a women of mixed-racial heritage creatively responded to the sociological theories, legal classifications, and societal stereotypes concerned with mixed-race Americans. By combining close readings of her surviving literature with informed historical imagination, it is possible to glean glimpses of Johnson's life and her stance on issues such as intraracial prejudice, miscegenation, and inhabiting a mixed-race body. Attaining even fragments of mixed-race women's lives through any surviving personal and creative testimony is vital to understanding how they navigated their particular existence, at a time when they were not only subjugated according to their race and gender, but also homogenised into that of the wider black community. Indeed, it will be shown that in their personal testimony and creative literature, each of these women addressed how issues including racial passing, interracial relationships and the privilege awarded to light-complexioned blacks influenced the everyday lives of mixed-race women.

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[395] Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives,* p.14-16 and pp.29-30; and Farmer, 'Into the Stacks,' p.290

[396] Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*, (The University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 2004) p.95

[397] Owen Dodson as quoted in Gloria T. Hull, *Color, Sex, and Poetry: Three Women Writers of the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) p.210
Johnson's surviving Papers are held at the Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.

Lives Worth Testifying

A New Orleansian of mixed white, African-American, and Native American heritage, Alice Ruth Moore (later to be Dunbar-Nelson) was born on July 19, 1875.[398] After working as a teacher, Dunbar-Nelson followed the archetypal African-American migratory pattern North by leaving New Orleans in 1896 to firstly seek opportunities in Boston, before moving to New York to continue her work in education.[399] Described as a "pretty yaller girl" by Mary Church Terrell's husband, her "long, thick auburn tresses and alabaster skin" placed her in elite black society long before her migration north.[400] While the precise specificities of her racial heritage are unclear, Dunbar-Nelson publically chose to be taken as a descendent of Louisiana's *gens de couleur*, or free people of colour, a group of mixed-blood Louisianans who were historically placed in a somewhat privileged position within the racial hierarchy of the Southern states superior to 'full-blooded Negroes.' In an article about this group of Louisianans published in 1916, she described people of her hue "with the African strain slightly apparent."[401]

Professionally, Dunbar-Nelson was a journalist and poet, and her attitude towards her own racial identity is best demonstrated through her authorial work. She began her literary career in 1895, when she published a collection of short stories, essays and poetry entitled *Violets and Other Tales*, before publishing *The Goodness of St Roque and Other Stories* in 1899.[402] Her attention then shifted to journalism and she edited the *A.M.E. Church Review* and the *Advocate,* although during the 1910s and 1920s she did publish some poems and a few anti-lynching plays.[403] In her work as a journalist she was frank and militant in her allegiance to the black women's club movement and African-American racial uplift efforts; while in poetry and prose it would seem her approach was more muted. Gloria Hull contends that this split authorial personality highlights that Dunbar-Nelson was uncomfortable with

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398 Brooks, 'Between Love and Hate, Black and White,' p.116, note no.1; and Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, (The University of North Carolina Press, 1996) p.209

399 Hull, *Colour, Sex, and Poetry*, p.40

400 She was described as a "pretty yaller girl" by Judge Robert Terrell. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Colour,* p.392, note no.89; and the "long, thick auburn tresses and alabaster skin" description is cited in Eleanor Alexander, *Lyrics of Sunshine and Shadow: The tragic courtship and marriage of Paul Laurence Dunbar and Alice Ruth Moore* (New York: New York University Press, 2001) p.44, and Gaines *Uplifting the Race,* p.211

401 Alice Dunbar-Nelson, 'People of Colour in Louisiana: Part 1,' *The Journal of Negro History,* Vol. 1, No. 4 (Oct., 1916) p.367

402 Alice Ruth Moore, *Violets and Other Tales*, (1895); also reprinted in Gloria T. Hull's (ed.) *The Works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*, Volume 1, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1988)

403 Gloria T. Hull, 'Alice Dunbar-Nelson: A Chronology,' in Gloria T. Hull's (ed.) *The Works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*, Volume 2, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1988) pp.lvii-lx

mixing race and "belletristic literature."[404] This may have been due to the restrictions of publishers at the start of the twentieth century, who determined what would be suitable to publish. For instance, the notion of expanding her short story 'The Stones of the Village' into a novel was rejected in 1900, because of assumptions that the American public disliked "color-line" fiction.[405] It will be shown that this issue was not unique to Dunbar-Nelson, as Hurston, like many other female writers of colour, had to censor her words and identity by 'talking out both sides of their mouths.'[406] Nonetheless, by re-reading many of Dunbar-Nelson's creative texts alongside her public writings and private musings, and taking her Creole roots into consideration, a more thorough picture of the complicated privilege and shame that came with living as a mixed-race women during the early twentieth century comes into view.

As a woman with mixed-racial heritage similarly born in the South, Zora Neale Hurston was a writer, folklorist and anthropologist prominent during the early-twentieth century, and at the centre of the New Negro Renaissance. There has been dispute over her exact birth date, with early sources placing her birth date at 1901 or 1905. However based on inscriptions in the Hurston family bible, it has since been generally accepted by scholars that she was born in Notasulga, Alabama in 1891, before her family relocated and spent her formative years in Eatonville, Florida.[407] One of the reasons behind this ambiguity lies in the fact that when Hurston moved to Baltimore in 1916, she lied that she was sixteen to get free schooling, despite actually being twenty-six years old.[408] Moreover, faced with the pressures of a literary and publishing industry that not only privileged white writers but also valued youth, many black women such as Hurston and Georgia Douglas Johnson lied about their age.[409] In 1920 Hurston graduated from Howard University before, at the age of 37, going on to receive a Bachelor's degree in anthropology from Barnard College, Columbia University in 1928. While at Barnard, she conducted ethnographic research with anthropologist Franz Boas and worked under the supervision of Melville Herskovits.[410] After graduating, she remained at Columbia as a graduate student to continue her anthropological studies. This

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[404] Hull, *Color, Sex, and Poetry*, p.19
[405] *Ibid.*
[406] Teresa Zackodnik cites P. Gabrielle Foreman's article as an important examination of the vernacular phrase 'talking out of both sides of their mouth.' Zackodnik, *The Mulatta and the Politics of Race*, p.199, note.5; Foreman, 'Looking Back from Zora,' pp.649-666
[407] For more information, please see: Elaine J. Lawless, 'What Zora Knew: A Crossroads, a Bargain with the Devil, and a Late Witness,' *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 126, No. 500 (2013) p.156
[408] *Ibid.*
[409] Hull, *Color, Sex, and Poetry*, p.12
[410] *Ibid.,* p.161

research, which saw Hurston measuring the heads of African-Americans for anthropometric purposes, undoubtedly influenced her understanding of race, aesthetics and culture in ways that can be identified throughout her body of work. For instance her first play, *Color Struck: A Play in Four Scenes* (1925), which will be analysed later, addressed the existence of mixed-race bodies within African-American communities by highlighting the complex reality of colourism and intraracial prejudice.[411] This is significant not only in itself but also in the wider context of this thesis, because the experience of intraracial prejudice was articulated in the plays, poems and diaries of every woman analysed within this study, and therefore indicates a key issue at play during this time for light-skinned women of mixed-racial heritage.

Whilst living and writing in the north east, Hurston became acquainted with not only Alice Dunbar-Nelson, but also Georgia Douglas Johnson. A fellow Southerner whose birthdate, like Hurston's, remains unclear, it is thought that Johnson was born in Marietta, Georgia to George and Laura Jackson Camp in either 1877 or 1880.[412] Traditionally referred to as the 'lady poet' of the Harlem Renaissance, Johnson is now recognised among scholars as, among other things, a gifted playwright and ardent anti-lynching activist.[413] As a woman of mixed-racial heritage whose creative work addressed an array of issues including racial oppression, mixed-racial identity, and motherhood, it would be valuable to consider how Johnson's personal life influenced her creative outputs. However, most of her unpublished material and personal testimony has been lost to the historical record. As a result, determining the details of Johnson's early life is challenging, particularly as she was extremely secretive about her parents, grandparents, and even her age.[414] Indeed, not much is known for sure about Johnson's racial heritage, although Claudia Tate claims that Johnson's mother had

[411] Zora Neale Hurston, *Color Struck: A Play in Four Scenes*, (1925) Reprinted in Kathy A. Perkins, *Black Female Playwrights: An Anthology of Plays before 1950*, (Indiana University Press, 1990) pp.89-102
[412] Historians such as Gloria T. Hull place the true date to be 1880 by deducing among other factors that obituary statements in 1966 gave her age as eighty-six. However Kathy Perkins and Judith Stephens cite September 10, 1877; with Stephens citing the date agreed upon by a group of scholars who worked to erect a headstone on Johnson's previously unmarked grave in 2000. Hull, *Color, Sex, and Poetry*, p.155 and Note.1, p.229; Kathy A. Perkins, *Black Female Playwrights : An Anthology of Plays Before 1950*, (Indiana University Press, 1990) p.21; and Judith L. Stephens, (ed.) *The Plays of Georgia Douglas Johnson: From the New Negro Renaissance to the Civil Rights Movement*, p.1, and p.45 note 1,;
[413] Johnson has been remembered as a poet, but over the past twenty years theatre historians and black feminist critics have revised and nuanced this status. For an analysis of Johnson's contribution to the lynching drama genre, please see: Mitchell, *Living with Lynching*; and Judith L. Stephens, 'Politics and Aesthetics, Race and Gender: Georgia Douglas Johnson's Lynching Dramas as Black Feminist Cultural Performance,' *Text and Performance Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No.3, (July, 2000) p.251
[414] For further examples of the confusion surrounding Johnson's birthdate, please see above as well as the following: Hull, *Color, Sex, and Poetry*, p.155 and Bower, *"Color Struck" Under the Gaze,* p.14

black and Native American heritage, while Johnson's father had black and white ancestry.[415] Gloria T. Hull suggests that "judging from her appearance, her lifelong preoccupation… with the miscegenation theme, and allusions made by others, she was a black person with considerable white blood in her ancestry."[416]

As noted above, Hurston was acquainted with Dunbar-Nelson and Johnson, due, in part, to the fact that both Hurston and Dunbar-Nelson were participants of the famous "S Street Literary Salon" regularly held at Johnson's Washington DC home.[417] During the 1920s and 1930s, Johnson's house became a significant gathering place for writers, artists, playwrights, and theorists of the New Negro era to meet and share their work while exchanging and experimenting with new ideas.[418] Highlighting the importance of Johnson's Salon, Glenn Carrington wrote that "if Dr Alain Locke was godfather to the younger writers and artists, Mrs Johnson was certainly their godmother."[419] Detailing the activities that took place at Johnson's home, Salon member and playwright Willis Richardson claimed: "every Saturday night we used to meet at nine o'clock and stay until two or three in the morningblue, [sic] discussing things like writing… some would read their poems and they would discuss them."[420] With an attendee list which reads as a 'who's who' of African-American intellectual and creative prowess, it can be assumed that this nurturing environment provided a space for writers such as Hurston, Dunbar-Nelson, and even Johnson herself to read extracts from their work and receive critique from the other artists gathered in in the Salon.[421] It could be construed that within this space, these three women were all exposed to the same debates and lines of reasoning, leading to shared understandings of miscegenation and mixed-race identity, especially as many of the "Saturday Nighters" salon participators were of mixed-racial heritage. Despite this, however, it will be shown that the personal testimony and creative literature produced by each of these women were not all in agreement about their experiences of being mixed-race; nor do they reveal a uniform narrative of how all mixed-race women negotiated their racial identities during this period.

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[415] Claudia Tate, *Selected Works of Georgia Douglas Johnson*, (New York: G.K. Hall, 1997) p.xxviii
[416] Hull, *Color, Sex and Poetry*, p.155
[417] A list of 'Literary Salon Personelle' within Johnson's personal papers cites attendees including, but not limited to: Mary Burrill, Jessie Fauset, Meta Warrick Fuller, Angelina 'Nina' Weld Grimké, Mrs. George Schuyler, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Toomer, W.E.B. Du Bois, Dr Alain Locke, Joel A. Rogers, Howard Thurman, Bruce Nugent, and Langston Hughes. Georgia Douglas Johnson Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Box 162-6, Folder 3
[418] Stephens, (ed.) *The Plays of Georgia Douglas Johnson,* p.13-15
[419] *Ibid.* p.16
[420] *Ibid.* p.15
[421] *Ibid.*

Indeed, the recollections and perspective of the final woman examined throughout this chapter at first appear in contention with that of Hurston, Johnson and Dunbar-Nelson, but ultimately reveal many surprising overlaps. Born in Chicago on March 28, 1901, and allegedly named after Anita Garibaldi, the feminist wife of Italian liberator Giuseppe Garibaldi, Anita Thompson grew up in Los Angeles before moving back to Chicago and being "the only brown-skinned girl" at her local grammar school.[422] Her additional surnames, 'Dickinson' and 'Reynolds,' were the result of two out of the three marriages she had.[423] Her Grandparents were part of the elite Essex Club "whose membership was drawn from the population of freed and escaped slaved and persons of mixed blood, many of them fair-skinned enough to 'pass' and melt into the general population of America."[424] Her parents, too, were part of an elite social scene which saw them regularly dine with members of the black intelligentsia, while her mother was a close friend of A'Lelia Walker, the African-American beauty heiress and entrepreneur. These family connections made Reynolds an extremely well-connected woman, and enabled her to move seamlessly between the company of black and white creatives, intellectuals, and public figures. For instance, she was a bridesmaid at Mae Walker's wedding; a cousin to Langston Hughes; visited Claude McKay in Morocco, and also had personal relationships with at least two key intellectuals of the early-twentieth century.[425] It is alleged that W.E.B. Du Bois was her first sexual partner, and that the only thing which kept Reynolds and Ralph Bunche from "falling into a serious engagement and immediate marriage" during the summer that they met, was "his youth and the fact that [Reynolds] wasn't ready to think about it yet."[426]

Although it is unclear whether Reynolds attended any of Johnson's "Saturday Nighters," it can be confidently asserted that she mixed in the same social circles as the three other women examined in this chapter. However, she did not recall the Washington DC social scene favourably. Whilst living in DC, Reynolds claimed that: "The life of the colored people in the Washington area was lively enough but even more formal than anything I'd experienced up until then. I found the whole scene to be stiff and uncomfortably

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[422] George Hutchinson, 'Introduction,' *American Cocktail*, p.22; Reynolds, *American Cocktail: A 'Colored Girl' in the World*, pp.75-75; and Reynolds, *American Cocktail*, p.65

[423] In 1931 she married Charles Henri Ford in Tangier, but the dubious legality of the ceremony and the "hint of phoniness" surrounding the officiating priest, meant that she did not consider their nine year union a real marriage. She then married Dwight Lloyd Dickinson in a legally-recognised ceremony in 1941, with whom she remained in matrimony until 1951; before her final wedding to Guy Reynolds in 1952. Reynolds, *American Cocktail*, p.194

[424] Reynolds, *American Cocktail*, p.59

[425] *Ibid.* p.135

[426] *Ibid.* p.110

segregated."[427] Remembering one occasion that she attempted to bring H.L. Mencken to an Alpha dance in the city, she claimed that hostess Muriel Milton was "absolutely appalled" and stated: "Why, we don't have white men at our parties. We don't have white people at all. But if we did, they would certainly have to be our social equals, and no journalist would ever fit in our parties."[428] Seeking an escape from the prejudice exhibited by both sides of the black/white colour line in the United States, Reynolds moved to Paris in 1928 and found that people of mixed-heritage or "cocktails" like herself were welcomed, highly-regarded, and considered attractive.[429] Her Transatlantic experience of race differs to that of the other women examined within this chapter, but nonetheless provides an important insight into the way in which a woman of mixed-racial heritage navigated the contours of racial hierarchy during the early twentieth century.

Whether the women examined within this chapter rejected or embraced their dual heritage, actively worked towards the promotion of civil rights or chose to capitalise on the privileges that their lighter skin granted, they were all very aware of the distinct experience that inhabiting a light-skinned African-American body engendered. Through complicated, and sometimes contradictory, intimate histories and creative expressions, the presence of shared experiences and collective frustrations at inter- and intra-racial prejudice suggests a level of homogeneity in the lived reality of being a mixed-race woman during the early twentieth century that is worthy of investigation. Moreover, by revealing that the seemingly 'fragmented' literary strategies of these women actually indicated a greater sense of agency and activism than would appear at face value, this chapter will challenge the continuing of 'tragic mulatta' stereotypes in contemporary analyses and contribute a more complex understanding of race relations during the early twentieth century to existing scholarship.

[427] Reynolds, *American Cocktail*, pp.105-106
[428] *Ibid*
[429] *Ibid.* pp.117-118

On the Mixed-Race Experience

This section will outline the personal experiences of mixed-race women, and how they navigated the complicated terrain of race, colour and gender prejudice in the early twentieth century United States. A good place to begin this analysis is by surveying the autobiographical works that Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Zora Neale Hurston, and Anita Reynolds composed during their adult live.[430] In May 1928, Hurston published an autobiographical essay entitled: 'How it Feels to be Coloured Me,' which directly explored the development of her own racial consciousness and revealed how she positioned her mixed-race heritage within the broader African-American community. At the start of the essay, Hurston opens with the declaration:

> I am Colored," before insisting "BUT I AM NOT tragically colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all. I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal and whose feelings are all but about it.[431]

These strong sentiments not only outline from the outset an apparent disenchantment with the 'tragic mulatto' trope, but also speak to Hurston's feelings about the discourse of 'racial solidarity' within the wider black community.

Throughout the essay, Hurston points to the fluidity of race and in particular her belief that race is not a fixed notion, but rather a changing state depending on one's environment. She claims that "I do not always feel colored," but that she is most aware of the physicality of race when she is "thrown against a sharp white background."[432] Pointing to her experience at Barnard as a specific example of such an environment, she explains "'Beside the waters of the Hudson' I feel my race. Among the thousand white persons, I am a dark rock surged upon, and overswept," before concluding that "through it all, I remain myself. When covered by the waters, I am; and the ebb but reveals me again."[433] While admitting to a sense of racial awareness, Hurston maintains a strong sense of self, and a confidence which she claimed enabled her to shake off prejudicial encounters. With a tone of humour, she contends:

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[430] For an exploration of black feminist theoretical literature on autobiography, and how it relates to the women examined within this chapter, please see the Introduction.

[431] Capitalisation in original. Zora Neale Hurston, 'How it Feels to be Colored Me,' *The World Tomorrow*, Vol.11, (May, 1928) pp.215-216

[432] *Ibid.*

[433] *Ibid.*

"Sometimes, I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me. How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It's beyond me."[434] Despite protestations that Du Bois' theory of double-consciousness did not apply to her: "I have no separate feeling about being an American citizen and colored," it can be argued that the subject matter of her work suggested that Hurston was significantly concerned with how the 'gaze' of a white-dominated society influenced African-American communities. In particular, Hurston's play *Colour Struck*, which will be explored in the second section of this chapter, reflected on the ways in which colourism and intraracial prejudice shaped black social life.

One year after Hurston wrote "How it Feels to be Colored Me,' Dunbar-Nelson wrote an autobiographical essay entitled 'Brass Ankles,' (1929) which detailed her personal experience of growing up mixed-race in Louisiana, before encountering colourism within African-American communities across the United States.[435] Gloria Hull claims that this essay was as close as Dunbar-Nelson got to revealing her feelings about having mixed-race status, and being labelled a "yaller nigger." According to Hull, Dunbar-Nelson "tried to publish it, but would not or could not do so under her own name, and the magazine editor refused to print it pseudonymously."[436] The essay opens with an observation that current literature on the "Race question" is either dominated by the phenomenon of racial 'passing,' or an increasing "interest and sentimentality concerning the poor, pitiful black girl, whose life is a torment among her own people, because of their 'blue vein' proclivities."[437] Using a classification popularised in E.C Adams' poem 'Brass Ankles' in *Nigger to Nigger* (1928), she identifies herself as one often accused of 'blue vein' proclivities, and describes herself as "white enough to pass for white, but with a darker family background, a real love for the mother race, and no desire to be numbered among the white race." In response Dunbar-Nelson declared, in a statement that inspired the premise of this chapter, that: "It seems but fair and just for now some of the neglected light-skinned colored people, who have not 'passed' to rise up and speak a word in self defence."[438] A call-to-arms of sorts, she then proceeds by recounting her earliest recollections of a troubled childhood rigidly demarcated

[434] *Ibid.*
[435] Dunbar-Nelson, 'Brass Ankles Speaks,' in Gloria T. Hull's (ed.) *The Works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*, Volume 2, pp.311-321
[436] Hull, 'Introduction,' in Gloria T. Hull's (ed.) *The Works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*, Volume 2, p.xxxv
[437] Dunbar-Nelson, 'Brass Ankles Speaks, p.311
[438] *Ibid.*

by skin tone in a Southern city where "complexion did, in a manner of speaking, determine one's social status."[439]

Early exposure to such rigid lines of demarcation were allegedly not drawn by the fairer children but instead by the darker students at the local public school attended by Dunbar-Nelson and her older sister. While she explained that growing up she herself "had no colour sense," as within her own family "Indian browns and café au laits, were mingled with pale bronze and blonde yellows;" at school she was taunted by darker-skinned children with gibes such as: "Half white nigger! Go on wid ya kind!"[440] It is interesting that a central component of her childhood memories of hallway harassment surrounded her hair particularly because, as Chapter One highlighted, hair was not only a means to express identity but it also formed a significant social and political point of contention within African-American communities. In particular, she detailed that her hair ribbons were frequently jerked off, and her loose curls dipped into ink-bottles which then dripped ink onto her carefully-washed frocks.[441] This treatment also extended to light-complexioned boys such as her neighbour, Charlie, who had the same "taffy-colored curls." Charlie however was allowed to cut his curls following the bitter bullying, while Dunbar-Nelson, who as a girl *must* wear curls, "wept in envy."[442] This seemingly trivial anecdote reveals the reality of the double binds of intraracial prejudice and gender prejudice which Dunbar-Nelson experienced as a young girl. While Charlie was able to cut his hair, societal expectations proscribed that she must keep her hair long.[443] Historian Kevin Gaines adds that throughout her life, "Dunbar-Nelson was forced to cope with the volatile, contradictory combination of light skin privilege on one hand, and on the other her subordinate status as a woman," before adding that light-skinned "women were more vulnerable to… judgements than were light-complexioned men."[444] Indeed the gendered stereotypes of mixed-race women, such as the sexually-deviant light-skinned Jezebel, outlined in the Introductory Chapter, permeated Dunbar-Nelson's childhood.

After years of misery in the public school system, Dunbar-Nelson explains that she was sent to a private American Missionary School, where she was surrounded by more

[439] *Ibid.*
[440] *Ibid.* p.312
[441] *Ibid.* p.313
[442] *Ibid.*
[443] The societal proscriptions placed on African-American women regarding idealised condition, length and style of hair is explored further in Chapter One.
[444] Gaines, *Uplifting the Race,* p.220

students of her own light brown complexion and, with the exception of the dark-skinned, heartbreaker Eddie who would not "demean himself by walking with a mere golden butterfly; far rather would he walk alone;" she spent the rest of her schooldays free of the prejudice she had experienced at public school.[445] Dunbar-Nelson's experience with Eddie, who would not associate with her, exposes an interesting adherence to the common belief that lighter-skinned African-American females were in some way deviant. While evidence does suggest that women of mixed-racial heritage were favoured by the African-American men in their communities, this experience highlights that light skin was not always privileged, but was on occasion derided. Indeed, as highlighted in Chapter One, people of mixed black-white descent were sometimes shunned due to the shame attached to the violation of black women at the hands of white men, or the perceived conceit of the 'mulatto elite.'[446] Out of desperation and in order to cope within this environment as young girls, Dunbar-Nelson claims that the light-skinned children at her public school banded together, not through 'blue vein snobbery' but simply to get by. Her older sister even had a gang of "'yellow niggers' that could do valiant service in the organised warfare between the dark ones and the light ones."[447] Such measures did little to alleviate the pervasiveness of the prejudice however, as the light-skinned Principal and teachers were powerless to defend the 'fair' children for fear of being reported to the Board of Education by parents of the darker children. Accusations of partiality on account of colour could not be risked by salary-dependent teachers at a time when the "'blue vein' proclivities" of light-complexioned Americans was a topic of contention within popular African-American literature.

The significance of Dunbar-Nelson's testimony surrounds the fact that it not only reveals her experience of colour prejudice as a young child, nor that it exposes the intraracial politics at play within her local Louisianan community, but that her experiences also highlight the pervasiveness of intraracial prejudice on a national level. Indeed, when Dunbar-Nelson herself became a teacher in a small city on the Mid-Atlantic Seaboard, she finally understood the apprehension expressed by her public school teachers in Louisiana. On her first day, she explains that when introduced to the predominantly dark-skinned faculty who "measured me with cold contempt and grim derision," she feared that she would never move

[445] Dunbar-Nelson, 'Brass Ankles Speaks,' p.315
[446] For further discussion of the contempt within African-American communities towards mixed-race people with black-white heritage please see Davis, *Who is Black?*, pp.57-58 and pp.134-139
[447] Dunbar-Nelson, 'Brass Ankles Speaks,' p.313

beyond "this unreasoning prejudice against my mere personal appearance."[448] She claimed that her colleagues would rebuff her attempts to be cordial, and refuse her offers of trips to places of amusement, and that even the parents of children who did not receive the grade they wanted would inundate her with scathing denunciations. Her fear extended to her students, who would whisper "Half white nigger" along the hallways, and she detailed the nerve-racking terror of never knowing where there would be an outbreak of unreasoning prejudice among those dark children."[449] When the lighter-skinned people within the community decided to socialise together, they were accused of an array of societal crimes such as organising a 'blue vein' society, and being lesbians or the mistresses of white men.[450]

Such accusations yet again highlight the way in which lighter-skinned African-American females were 'othered' and ostracised from community standards of moral behaviour as a direct result of the social signifiers attached to their skin tone. It was noted earlier that these signifiers were particularly charged to light-skinned women, and not men of a similar complexion. These inescapable accusations of female sexual or social deviance followed Dunbar-Nelson throughout the course of her life and across the United States, and underline the intersecting systems of social oppression experienced by mixed-race women during the opening decades of the twentieth century. Towards the end of the essay, Dunbar-Nelson contends that her experiences of colour prejudice within various African-American communities would have been worse than the white racism faced by individuals of the black race:

> I have been snubbed and ostracized with subtle cruelties that I am safe to assert have hardly been duplicated by the experiences of dark people in their dealings with Caucasians. I say more cruel, for I have been foolishly optimistic enough to expect sympathy, understanding and help from my own people – and that I receive rarely outside of individuals of my own or allied complexion.[451]

By stating that "there are a thousand subtleties of refined cruelty which every fair colored person must suffer at the hands of his or her own people;" Dunbar-Nelson concludes her essay with a declaration of what she believed having mixed-race heritage in America

[448] *Ibid.* pp.317-318
[449] *Ibid.* p.318
[450] *Ibid.*
[451] *Ibid.* p.319

encompassed: "the 'yaller niggers,' the 'Brass Ankles' must bear the hatred of their own and the prejudice of the white race."[452] While the sentiments expressed throughout this essay highlight the varying ways in which Dunbar-Nelson experienced and negotiated the realities of mixed-race ancestry in various communities across the United States, it is important to note that this essay was not published during her lifetime. This does not, however, mean that Dunbar-Nelson did not intend for 'Brass Ankles' to one day be read by an audience. Indeed, it can be argued that throughout the 1920s and early 1930s Dunbar-Nelson wrote autobiographical texts written with the purpose of validating to an unknown future audience her thoughts and experiences as a women of mixed-racial heritage during the early-twentieth century.

In comparison to the frank and angst-ridden testimony of Dunbar-Nelson, Anita Reynolds articulated a more complex, and at times contradictory, experience of inhabiting a light-skinned body during the early twentieth century. Reynold's memoir *American Cocktail* opens by illustrating and uncovering the complex lives and racial identities of Reynold's multi-hued family. In an early draft, she explains that her mixed Cherokee-white maternal grandmother, Medora Reed, would say that their family "belonged on neither side of the tracks but in the middle – dodging trains headed in opposite directions."[453] This notion of being 'hit' from all sides of the colour line, goes some way to explain why 'racial passing' was considered a defensible and even advantageous path to take by members of her family. Within Reynolds's immediate family however, despite the fact that her mother's "ivory skin and golden hair" could easily have enabled her to 'pass' for white, she chose to "think herself as Negro."[454] Her family's perception of the nonsensical one-drop rule is also insightful. When referring to her grandmother's love of scandalous stories, in particular the popular rumour that President Harding had Negro blood, Reynolds explains that sharing such stories "seemed to be her way of passing on the tradition of laughing at the American culture. She was old enough to see the joke, and I was young enough to learn it."[455] Detailing her father's large Chicagoan family, Reynolds explains that "I was so protected by their warmth, it never

[452] *Ibid.* pp.320-321
[453] Anita Reynolds, 'Draft No. 1,' (August 24, 1975) Anita Thompson Dickinson Reynolds Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 129-4, p.19
[454] Reynolds, *American Cocktail*, pp.60-61
[455] *Ibid.* p.75

occurred to me that any of us was different from the majority of people in Chicago, or that we belonged to a 'minority' group."[456]

One incident however which forced Reynolds to recognise the reality of racial difference in the United States, came after her father was involved in a fight which led to the death of a white man. While working as a redcap her father had a long running battle with an overbearing white conductor, and when one day the conductor attacked her father, calling him a 'nigger,' he responded by hitting the conductor on the head with his shoe. The blow meant the man never regained consciousness, and died in hospital the next day.[457] The fight had serious repercussions and, contextualising its significance, Reynolds explained "it was all rather like the Jack Johnson–Jim Jeffries fight. While everyone else was screaming for Jim Jeffries to knock out the 'Black Monster,' we secretly cheered for Johnson."[458] Summarising her thoughts on the matter, she concluded that in the end, "it was easier to be the white man's burden than to carry it."[459] Although she did not consider herself different as a child, as Reynolds grew to adulthood she became aware of the presumed sexual availability attached to the bodies of African-American women of all hues. Part of this revelation came in 1916 when she told the mailman that it was her fifteenth birthday and he replied: "Baby, I'm sorry to hear that. With those bedroom eyes you're in for one hell of a life."[460] Linking this response to Reynolds's particular experience as a woman of mixed-race, Patricia Williams argues that this underscores "the degree to which the purported tragedy tucked into the status of being mulatta is a presumption of irresistible sexual invitation, coupled with exceptional vulnerability to violent exploitation."[461] This experience highlights Reynolds's growing consciousness of the pervasive sexual exploitation which had been afflicted upon women of colour within her own community, and an awareness of how this reality had the potential to influence her life.

Early in her memoir, Reynolds briefly touched on her family history of illegitimacy and sexual exploitation under enslavement, by sharing an anecdote about her maternal grandmother who would allegedly contend: "When in the hanged man's house, do not speak of rope!"[462] In other words, the horrors of interracial rape, exploitation and illegitimacy were

[456] *Ibid.* p.62
[457] *Ibid.* p.72
[458] *Ibid.* p.73
[459] *Ibid.*
[460] *Ibid.* p.83
[461] Patricia Williams, 'Foreword,' *American Cocktail*, pp.2-3
[462] Reynolds, *American Cocktail*, p.58

not to be discussed. In terms of her own interracial relationships with white men, Reynolds displayed an unease, claiming that: "I was brought up to believe that a white man might want to have a sexual affair with me, but that he would not respect me afterwards… the fear of being taken for a 'high yaller easy lay' inhibited any notion I might have had about an inter-racial affair."[463] That the stereotype of 'high yaller easy lays' influenced the way in which Reynolds lived her life is significant, as it highlights the extent to which dominant prejudicial beliefs could be internalised by mixed-race women and subsequently influence their lived experience during twentieth-century America. It is worth pointing out, however, that despite recalling such trepidations in later years, Reynolds had actually engaged in many interracial relationships over the course of her life, including her marriages to Dwight Lloyd Dickinson and Guy Reynolds, who were both white.

In contrast to the other mixed-race women analysed within this chapter, Reynolds expressed an uneasiness with engaging in what she termed the 'Negro problem.' Her conflicted feelings about racial activism are first mentioned when she recalls her attendance at the NAACP Annual Convention in Kansas City in 1923. She explains that the convention discussed the case of a group of African-American soldiers who had been sent to a federal penitentiary after someone was shot in a Texas bar where they had been refused a drink. As none of the men would expose the guilty soldier, twenty-five of them were dishonourably discharged and sent to the prison for thirty years.[464] Relieved that she was not called upon to speak, she claims she would have urged every black man in a United States uniform to "shoot 'em up. The Army can't put you all in jail. Better to die fighting for your own rights than to kill Germans to 'make the world safe for Democracy!"[465] Recognising the hypocrisy of this sentiment in light of her own privileged life, she confessed "this sort of thing caused quite a battle with my personality… Dancing and flirting were all well and good, but they didn't mix too well with social problems, nor could they unburden me from the cloak of guilt I bore."[466]

In order to distance herself from this guilt, in 1928 she went to France, a country to which she sensed she "really belonged." This move marked the beginning of her life as a "café au lait," a term she consistently used throughout her oral interviews to mark her new

[463] Reynolds, *American Cocktail*, p.101
[464] *Ibid.* p.95
[465] *Ibid.*
[466] *Ibid.*

identity now that she no longer lived under the black and white flag in America.[467] She underlined the ease with which she settled into life on the other side of the Atlantic, "away from the lynchings, away from the Negro problem, away from the polarization, away from all the disagreeable aspects of my life in the United States."[468] While in France, Reynolds found that Parisians "usually found the métisse, the person of mixed blood, or the Negro or Indian, to be attractive. The 'cocktails' were often welcome in many places where white Americans were not."[469] Enjoying the newfound freedom from prejudice she was awarded in Europe, often led to arguments with her some of her black American friends. While spending time with her friend Claude McKay in Morocco, for instance, Reynolds claimed they frequently disagreed over their attitudes to blackness: "He felt most strongly that anyone who had black blood should be Africanized;" and whenever they went out together he would ask her to "nap up her hair."[470] She alleged it was the only way to make her look 'African,' but not only did she not like shoe polish, she also felt that this was no way to take care of the 'problem.'[471] Instead, she argued that "there were already too many different races and nationalities, and it was far past time we all got together to be one family."[472] Building on this notion of racial unity rather than demarcation, Reynolds's sentiments about the philosophy of Marcus Garvey and the Black Nationalist movement were quite clear-cut. Even though her father's brother, Noah, worked as Garvey's public relations counsellor, she "couldn't see much sense in taking half the black population of the United States and moving with them to poverty-stricken Africa."[473]

One action Reynolds did take in response to the pervasive violence that African-Americans were subjected to, was to write a lynching story. After she "put [her] soul into the skin of a girl who was supposed to have been raped by the man who was lynched," she sent the story to a literary magazine in London.[474] While the story was accepted, Reynolds hesitated because the editor wanted to make it into a series, but she had nothing more to say:

[467] Oral recording of Anita Thompson Dickinson Reynolds, Chess Has No Princess – Tape 1, May 1, 1980. Anita Thompson Dickinson Reynolds Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 129-15
[468] Reynolds, *American Cocktail*, p.113
[469] *Ibid.* pp.117-118
[470] Reynolds, *American Cocktail*, pp.136-137; and Oral recording of Anita Thompson Dickinson Reynolds, Chess Has No Princess – Tape 1, May 1, 1980. Anita Thompson Dickinson Reynolds Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 129-15
[471] Oral recording of Reynolds, Chess Has No Princess – Tape 1, May 1, 1980.
[472] Reynolds, *American Cocktail*, pp.136-137
[473] *Ibid.* p.100
[474] *Ibid.* p.127

> "The fact of the matter was that I had pretty well forgotten the disagreeable facets of American life…. I was not reminded of the horrors of American lynchings every day, nor did I care to be. One must feel deeply to want to write about these things, but at the time, I wanted to be living in a light, gay way, not feeling deeply about much of anything."[475]

That she did not "care" to be reminded of the horrors of American lynchings highlights the exceedingly privileged life Reynolds lived; able to live the best of both worlds without shouldering the burden of racial discrimination. Although she told her friend Arthur Wheeler that she had always "felt a guiding passion to try to improve racial relationships, to get people of different nationalities, colors and religions to understand and appreciate each other," the "intergroup tensions didn't affect [her] personally," and so she did little to work towards interracial cooperation.[476] Indeed, while she admitted to feeling "a little guilty saying how much fun I have had being a colored girl in the twentieth century," when most of her contemporaries had "chiefly tales of woe to tell," Reynolds was not motivated to use the privileges granted by her wealth and racially-ambiguous appearance to challenge racial inequality.[477] It can be contended that her perspective was clouded by a privileged ignorance, and that that privilege enabled her to dismiss any guilt she may have felt for not only choosing to ignore the horrors of racial violence, but also engaging in a system which propagated the continuation of racial hierarchy. For instance, despite a long passage in her memoir about the existence of slavery in Morocco which, as she explained, saw young children and women bought, trafficked and sold as concubines, she concluded that: "Yes, things were quite different from the life I had known, but I wanted to immerse myself in the Arab way of life."[478] She then went on to own a slave for a brief time: "Wamba came into my home like a newly adopted puppy and became so entirely mine that I was as reluctant to send her back to the Snoussis – when I returned to Europe."[479] While owning a slave in Morocco may have been bound up in class status rather than race, it is nonetheless striking that a woman who admitted that interracial rape, sexual exploitation and illegitimacy formed a part of her own heritage, and accounted for her family's light skin, could own a slave simply to "immerse" herself in a particular "way of life."

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475 *Ibid.* pp.127-128
476 *Ibid.* p.129
477 Williams, 'Foreword,' *American Cocktail*, pp.6-7
478 Reynolds, *American Cocktail*, pp.144-145
479 *Ibid.* p.149

This seemingly contradictory justification could signify a common reality of navigating the early twentieth century while occupying a racially-ambiguous body: a struggle to situate ones ideological standpoint within the prescribed social norms of a racially-ranked environment. Reynolds's disjointed thinking can, to a limited extent, be linked to the split authorial personality perceivably displayed by Dunbar-Nelson and by Hurston in each of their respective creative works. While Reynolds may have taken a slave in order to fit in with the customs of elevated Moroccan society, however, Dunbar-Nelson and Hurston tapped into a long tradition of double-voiced discourse to veil their dissent but ultimately challenge and critique the existence of racial inequality.

Talking Out Both Sides of Their Mouths

Historical and literary analyses of Hurston's 1942 autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, interpret her seemingly disjointed authorial technique in a variety of ways. Literary critic Martha Bower has used R.D. Laing's psychoanalytical theory to argue that the fragmented nature of Hurston's creative and autobiographical works provides evidence of her own fragmented psyche.[480] However, scholars such as Pierre A. Walker and Tanya Y. Kam, separately call for the application of different analytical frameworks to move conclusions about Hurston away from a 'tragic mulatto' narrative of 'fragmented' personas, towards one of agency and resistance. More specifically, Kam calls for a reconsideration of the seemingly contradictory nature of *Dust Tracks,* and a recognition of the subtle ways in which Hurston critiqued racial hierarchies. In particular, Kam applies elements of narrative theory to expose how Hurston's double-voiced discourse appealed to the white publishers she had to abide by while at the same time highlighting the existence of power imbalances throughout her life.[481] She contends that: "…the gaze of a white benefactor on an African American body leads to a performance on Zora's part. Because Hurston is dependent on the patronage of whites, she is not at liberty to directly criticize them or paint unflattering portraits of them, so she does so indirectly."[482] One such example of Hurston's double-voiced approach lies in a childhood anecdote. Staging her enthusiasm for school in front of white visitors to her all-black Floridian school, Hurston muses: "I hated things that I couldn't do anything about. But I

[480] Bower, *"Color Struck" Under the Gaze,* p.4
[481] Tanya Y. Kam, 'Velvet Coats and Manicured Nails: The Body Speaks Resistance in Dust Tracks on a Road,' *Southern Literary Journal*, Volume xlii, number 1, (fall 2009) pp.74-76
[482] *Ibid.* p.82

knew better than to bring that up right there, so I said yes, I loved school."[483] In other words, when prompted, she made the conscious decision to say what she believed the white visitors and her teachers wanted to hear. With regard to this particular account, Kam suggests that this strategy of accommodation toward those in power parallels the mind-set which shaped *Dust Track's* overall narrative: "Hurston did not feel empowered to voice her critiques directly, so she wrote an upbeat memoir that she thought her sponsors would endorse."[484] Both as a young girl and then again as an adult recollecting the story for her autobiography, Hurston's camouflaged dissent can be traced in her exposure of power imbalances.[485] This can be directly linked to Dunbar-Nelson who, as noted earlier, was frank and militant in her allegiance to the black women's club movement and African-American racial uplift efforts in her journalism, but adopted a more muted approach in her poetry and prose. Like Hurston, Dunbar-Nelson had to satisfy the expectations of publishers in order to get her work published, build a career and, importantly, earn money from her work.[486]

Kam's application of narrative theory builds on Teresa Zacodnik's argument that African-American women writers of the nineteenth century, had to 'talk out both sides of their mouths.'[487] Recognising that female African-American abolitionists often addressed predominately white audiences, Zackodnik highlights that double-voiced discourse enabled these women to appeal to the empathy of their white listeners, while also encourage their identification with enslaved listeners, "yet also critique that very empathy and identification as eliding the differences in material condition between free white and enslaved blacks to which they were calling attention."[488] Extending this strategy from nineteenth-century writers such as Frances Harper and Pauline Hopkins, to that of twentieth-century writers Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen, whose work at some point focussed on mulatta heroines and who were all accused of "adopting white values and a bourgeois ethos," Zackodnik contends that these writers "'talk out both sides of their mouths,' signifying on the very values they have been accused of colluding with, and accessing narrative strategies used by both 'mainstream' and African American writers in order to challenge constructions of race and racialized

[483] Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography* (New York, Harper Perennial, 2006) p.37; and Kam, 'Velvet Coats and Manicured Nails,' pp.75-76
[484] Kam, 'Velvet Coats and Manicured Nails,' p.76
[485] *Ibid.*
[486] Hull, *Color, Sex, and Poetry*, p.19
[487] Zackodnik, *The Mulatta and the Politics of Race*, p.199, note.5; Foreman, 'Looking Back from Zora,' pp.649-666
[488] Zackodnik, *The Mulatta and the Politics of Race*, p.xviii

womanhood."[489] With this in mind, rather than connecting Hurston's authorial technique to the stereotyped 'fragmented' psyche of 'marginal mulattoes,' as Bower does, it is more useful to consider the context within which Hurston was operating and recognise that she in fact tapped into a long tradition of double-voiced discourse.

Adopting an alternative analytical approach, Pierre Walker argues that *Dust Tracks* should instead be examined with poststructuralism in mind.[490] In particular, Walker argues that Enlightenment beliefs about a stable, coherent self means that readers expect homogeneity in autobiographies, however because Hurston resists this Cartesian or Enlightenment paradigm, readers are disappointed.[491] "Because the form of Hurston's text is inconsistent and paradoxical, it reflects the persona it represents, who is herself inconsistent and paradoxical."[492] One of the main critiques that scholars have made about *Dust Tracks* is that the five appendix-style chapters, which feature at the end, do not continue the chronical narrative of Hurston's life as the preceding eleven chapters do. As Walker has argued, however, these final chapters can be interpreted as a critical response to nineteenth-century slave narratives which often contained appended documents by white abolitionists, whose primary purpose was to guarantee the authenticity the narrative.[493] For instance, while African-American women such as Harriet Jacobs published her 1861 autobiographical novel *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* in her own words, the text not only had an introduction from her white editor Lydia Marie Childs authenticating the narrative, but also two additional supporting statements in the appendix. The first statement was written by the white abolitionist Amy Post, "a member of the Society of Friends in the State of New York," while the second was from a "highly respectable colored citizen of Boston" named George W. Lowther.[494] That Jacobs' testimony required such a high level of endorsement from two white women and an African-American man to testify the authenticity of her words, highlights the double-binds of race and gender which African-American women had to overcome in order to be given a platform. By writing her own appendices, Hurston not only spoke to the many historical and contemporary social oppressions which black women who relied on white

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[489] *Ibid.* p.xii
[490] Pierre A. Walker, 'Zora Neale Hurston and the Post-Modern Self in Dust Tracks on a Road,' *African American Review*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Autumn, 1998), pp.387-399
[491] *Ibid.* p.389
[492] *Ibid.*
[493] *Ibid.* p.390
[494] Linda Brent (Harriet Ann Jacobs), *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*, edited by L. Maria Child (Boston: 1861; Electronic Edition: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2003) pp.304-306

patronage continued to face in the twentieth century, but also asserted that an African-American female writer is capable of validating her own authenticity.[495]

Although Bower's reliance on psychoanalysis is somewhat unconvincing, her reflection that Hurston was "a mulatto writer at odds with the politics, religion, and ideologies of her black peers," raises an important consideration.[496] While Hurston was racially-classified by American society as a 'Negro,' the lived reality of mixed-racial heritage was evidently important enough for Hurston to feel the need to comment on this facet of her identity as a mixed-race woman. Indeed, throughout *Dust Tracks,* Hurston expressed an awareness of both the pride and shame that designated to mixed-race Americans of black-white descent, by claiming: "I am mixed-blood, it is true, but I differ from the party line in that I neither consider it an honor nor a shame. I neither claim Jefferson as my grandpa, nor exclaim, 'Just look how that white man took advantage of my grandma!'"[497] In addition, she commented on the lore of claiming Native American heritage within African-American communities: "I saw no benefit in excusing my looks by claiming to be half Indian. In fact, I boast that I am the only Negro in the United States whose grandfather on the mother's side was *not* an Indian chief."[498] In *Dust Tracks,* Hurston questioned "…if it was so honourable and glorious to be black, why wus it the yellow-skinned among us had so much prestige?"[499] Again Hurston demonstrates her disenchantment with the contradictory discourse of 'racial solidarity,' by directly critiquing the existence of colourism within the wider black community.

The subject matter of Hurston's literary work does not reveal evidence of a 'fragmented psyche,' which is stereotypically said to embody people with mixed-racial heritage, but rather Hurston uses this indirect and seemingly contradictory strategy to highlight the hypocrisies of race within the United States. Hurston's authorial technique has often been misunderstood by scholars taking her work at face-value, because she veiled her dissent. As she relied on white patrons and had to ensure continued economic stability, Hurston could not openly voice her critique and therefore was not pandering to white ideals, but instead was not only doing what was necessary in order to survive, while also

[495] Walker, 'Zora Neale Hurston and the Post-Modern Self in Dust Tracks on a Road,' p.390
[496] Bower, *"Color Struck" Under the Gaze,* p.61
[497] Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road,* p.191
[498] *Ibid.*
[499] Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography*

highlighting and critiquing the reality of economic difference and white patronage in the South.[500]

To Pass, or Not To Pass: Perceptions of Racial Passing

Throughout several of her autobiographical writings, Alice Dunbar-Nelson presented a fear of being judged by the African-American community as someone intending to racially 'pass,' and expressed that she did not want to be categorised as a 'tragic' light-complexioned American trying to abandon their race. She explained:

> I have had my friends meet me downtown in city streets and turn their heads away, so positive that I do not want to speak to them. Sometimes I have to go out of my way and pluck at their sleeves to force them to speak. If I do not, then it is reported around that I 'pass' when I am downtown – and sad is my case among my own kind then.[501]

Another incident took place during her time at college when she lived with an African-American family in a house where her room was uncomfortable and the food terrible, which led to her applying for and securing a place in a campus cottage. While no race restrictions existed for campus dormitories, she claimed that "this branded me at once among the colored students. I was said to be 'passing,' though nothing was further from my mind."[502] She also 'unwittingly passed' when she secured a job at a city department store but was fired for deception after an African-American employee "spotted" her. While she claims that she had applied for a job in the stockroom, and that the head of the placing bureau said that "only colored girls work there," she did not correct him when he placed her in the customer-facing book department.[503] Despite proclamations that it was others who assumed she was attempting to deceive, Dunbar-Nelson did, on a number of occasions, intentionally 'pass' for white.

Denied access to racially-segregated theatres and galleries, her decision to 'pass' in these instances were a strategic negotiation of identity that often resulted in acute anxiety.

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[500] Historian Yuval Taylor highlights that Hurston's white patron, Charlotte Osgood Mason, tried to control Hurston's writing, and worked to advance her own preoccupation with 'primitivism' and perception of the "American Negro as the archetypal primitive, a bridge to an uncorrupted world." Yuval Taylor, *Zora and Langston: A Story of Friendship and Betrayal*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019) p.4
For further examination of Hurston's relationship with Mason, see Taylor, *Zora and Langston*, pp.129-134 and p.86

[501] Dunbar-Nelson, 'Brass Ankles Speaks,' p.320

[502] *Ibid.* p.316

[503] *Ibid.* p.320

With regard to one incident in which she 'passed' with her step-daughter and niece at a cinema in Atlantic City, she claimed: "I was conscious of misgivings, and a pounding in my throat when we approached the ticket-taker. Suppose he should not let us take our seats? … I choked with apprehension, realized that I was invoking trouble and must not think destructive things, and went on in." After nothing happened and the group went home without the humiliation of being exposed, she reflected: "How splendid it must be never to have any apprehension about one's treatment anywhere?"[504] In addition, while travelling on a train car in South Carolina in 1930 she claimed: "I did not go J.C. [Jim Crow], I had the satisfaction of knowing that there were at least three other white women in upper [berths]."[505] According to Kristina Brooks, her use of the term "other white women" indicates that she viewed herself as a racial performer, and that 'passing' for white was a strategic deployment of racial identity.[506] Although Dunbar-Nelson's active decision to 'pass' may suggest she had aspirations to align within the white race, she does critique the existence of segregation by highlighting the impossibility of physiognomically reading race, and also by posing the question of what a privilege it would be to not have to perilously navigate such borders. Publically, Dunbar-Nelson condemned the practice of 'passing,' but as Kevin Gaines points out, her review of white author Vera Caspery's novel *The White Girl*, commended the portrayal of a black woman passing for white, remarking that the book was realistic in its observation of the judgmental gaze by black men that took the specific form of a desire to reclaim black women sexually for 'the race.'[507] With that in mind, it can be suggested that she deemed the criticism espoused by black men towards black women who chose to 'pass' as evidence of black patriarchal control, and therefore situated her perception of 'passing' in an intersectional analytical framework which recognised the multifaceted experiences faced by African-American women subjugated according to their gender as well as their race and physical appearance.

Furthermore, her regular column in the *Pittsburgh Courier* declared her disregard for the continued and historical subjugation of African-Americans at the hands of white society. In an article written in 1926 she exposed the historical sexual exploitation of African-Americans and attributed the development of intraracial colourism to white slaveholders. She contended that 'in the veins' of twelve million African-American souls, "thanks to the white

[504] Dunbar-Nelson, *Give Us Each Day,* p.69
[505] *Ibid.* pp.350-354
[506] Brooks, 'Between Love and Hate,' p.115
[507] Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, p.229

man, run the fires of Spain and Italy, the independence of England and Ireland, the canniness of the Scot… the treachery of the Greek, the methodicality [sic] of the German… and the low cunning of the Balkans."[508] She then goes on to state that, "thanks again to the white man," these African-Americans were taught to "despise members of his own race… in order to safeguard the white man. For the Southern planter knew that if ever there were union among the slaves he was doomed, so he trained them to disunion and disharmony."[509] This notion that bad behavioural traits were inherited from white rapists links to wider sentiments within the African-American intelligentsia. More specifically, it can be likened to the thoughts of W.E.B. Du Bois, who propagated the idea that immorality within the African-American community was caused by adulterous white slavers who genetically-instilled corruption in their mixed-race children, and that these characteristics remained concentrated within the black community as a result of Jim Crow segregation.[510] In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois declared: "The red stain of bastardy, which two centuries of systematic legal defilement of Negro women had stamped upon his race, meant not only the loss of ancient African chastity, but also the hereditary weight of a mass of corruption from white adulterers, threatening almost the obliteration of the Negro home."[511] Dunbar-Nelson's public condemnations therefore fit into the rhetoric espoused by key African-American activists during the early twentieth-century.

The privilege experienced by Anita Reynolds, outlined earlier, is further epitomised by her ability to 'pass' as a variety of racial groups depending on which suited her at the time. Her first "passing role" was during her time at the Norma Gould's School of Dancing. As the school did not admit black or Jewish students, her teacher Miss Gould told the other students Reynolds's brown skin was because she was Mexican and, "to play the part more fully," she took on the pseudonym Matelle.[512] Throughout her acting career, too, she was frequently cast in 'exotic' roles, and in one film she played a character who had grown up unaware of her 'Negro blood.' Reynolds explains that this was possible because the camera made her golden skin look white, and details that the film's climax came when her character found out her true identity: "I had to pull on my face most dramatically and utter with astonishment: 'My God,

[508] Alice Dunbar-Nelson, 'Une Femme Dit,' originally published in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 19, 1926. Reprinted in in Gloria T. Hull's (ed.) *The Works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*, Volume 2, pp.170-171
[509] *Ibid.*
[510] Dorr and Logan, '"Quality, Not Mere Quantity Counts,"' p.72
[511] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, p.5
[512] Reynolds, *American Cocktail*, p.86

I'm a Negro!' It was difficult to stifle the giggles."[513] Reflecting on the realities of U.S. anti-miscegenation laws, Reynolds relayed that on the day she married Dwight Dickinson, she was forced to 'pass' as white in order to be granted a marriage certificate. Detailing the event, she claims that the clerk "looked at us over his glasses and said 'white I suppose?' Dwight said 'what the hell do you think she is?' These experiences seemed funny and yet they weren't funny."[514] While these recollections suggest that Reynolds only 'passed' for employment or bureaucratic reasons, there were instances when Reynolds actively chose to 'pass' as white. In one particular oral interview Reynolds recounted the experience of a 1927 train journey to New York, when she was asked if she wanted to go in the white or 'colored' car. She explains that because she was 'all dressed up' she chose the white car, but as the train left she was surrounded by white rednecks. When she looked through to the Jim Crow car and the occupants were playing a banjo, passing around fried chicken and cornbread, and having a good time, she claims to have asked herself why she was in that "red plush surrounded by horrible scrawny white trash" when she could have been having fun.[515] She ends by reasoning that as she "wasn't really black," she wouldn't have been accepted in the 'colored' car anyway.[516]

This incident is significant in a number of ways. Not only does it highlight the borders that people of mixed-racial heritage had the privilege of navigating, but it also reveals a belief in the existence of specific qualities which make a person authentically 'black,' as well as evidence that the act of 'choosing a side' could lead to feelings of rejection and as a sense of guilt about making the decision to 'pass' as white. However, as the memoir progresses it would appear that these feelings of guilt are short-lived, and that Reynolds actually held her looks and racial ambiguity in remarkably high-regard; particularly as she sent correspondents, mainly men, photographs of herself in bikinis and emphasised the 'exotic' nature of her appearance.[517] It could also be suggested that Reynolds played up to her 'exoticism' by engaging in activities such as palm reading. While belittling her palm reading as merely a

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[513] *Ibid.* p.87
[514] Oral recording of Anita Thompson Dickinson Reynolds, Chess Has No Princess – Tape 2, May 6, 1980. Anita Thompson Dickinson Reynolds Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 129-15
[515] *Ibid.*
[516] *Ibid.*
[517] For instance, a letter from Guillermo Aragon thanks Anita for the "very nice photograph" and claims she looks "good enough to eat." Guillermo E. Aragon to Anita Reynolds, April 28, 1969. Anita Thompson Dickinson Reynolds Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 129-1, Folder 12, Correspondence. Furthermore, in February 1960, Ralph Bunche thanks her for the "attractive snapshots" of herself. Ralph Bunche to Anita Reynolds, February 3 1960. Anita Thompson Dickinson Reynolds Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 129-1, Folder 13, Correspondence.

parlour game, Reynolds acknowledged that when she read people's palms at parties she had a "captivated audience."[518] Furthermore, during her time living in Morocco Reynolds expressed that she liked hiding behind a veil which only exposed one's eyes. She admitted that she "enjoyed the anonymity of the veil," as it was "more pleasant, more comfortable, than being gaped at, singled out and judged"[519] This could speak to a wider desire to conceal her racial identity, and perhaps suggest that she relished in the notion of racial ambiguity.

For Dunbar-Nelson and Reynolds, the practice of 'passing' demonstrated a way to challenge, critique, and defy the racial boundaries which dominated American society. While Reynolds claimed that she 'passed' to secure employment opportunities, her testimony suggests that she also enjoyed the sense of mystery and intrigue that her racial ambiguity imparted. On the other hand, although Dunbar-Nelson similarly 'passed' to gain employment and social advantages, she framed the, often black male, criticism of the practice within the intersectional challenges that women of colour face due to their race and their gender. This suggests that a wider sense of agency and contemplation factored into her decision to 'pass.' That so many of the women throughout each chapter of this thesis participated in the practice of 'passing,' whether as white or an alternative ethnic identity, exposes both the challenges and the privileges which shaped mixed-race lives throughout the early twentieth century. Ultimately, the interplay between racial ambiguity and 'passing' by people of mixed-racial heritage, is an important concept which would benefit from further analysis.

Creative Interpretations of Mixed-Race, by Mixed-Race Women

While the first half of this chapter examined the personal testimony of mixed-race women and analysed how they understood their mixed-race heritage within the context of early twentieth century racial politics, the second half of this chapter will explore how these women creatively responded to the stereotypes about mixed-race women. It will be shown that through various forms of creative literature, these women articulated their critique and dissent of contemporary racial philosophies, as well as their hope and optimism for a racially integrated future. Rather than stringently focus on the work of each artist separately, this section will be divided thematically to highlight the various issues these mixed-race women similarly sought to address. More specifically, it will address issues how interracial relationships were referred to in the creative literature produced during the early-twentieth

[518] Reynolds, *American Cocktail*, p.117
[519] *Ibid.*, p.138

century, and how racial passing and notions of intraracial colourism were addressed, before honing in on Alice Dunbar-Nelson's unique portrayal of racially-mixed 'people of colour' in New Orleans.

Regardless of her precise racial lineage, it can definitively be asserted that the characters and subjects throughout Georgia Douglas Johnson's work exhibited fragmented racial identities. Literary critic Martha Gilman Bower has taken this as an indication that Johnson herself suffered from a "repressed identity."[520] In order to reach this conclusion, Bower evaluated Johnson's work through the analytical framework of psychoanalyst R.D. Laing.[521] This approach could be utilised in the evaluation of how mixed-race women, like Johnson, interpreted their own sense of being within the racial hierarchy of the United States. However, it is more useful to consider how Johnson may have employed the rhetoric of a 'divided-self' in response to existing sociological concepts such as W.E.B. Du Bois's notion of 'double-consciousness.' A term introduced by Du Bois in his 1903 publication, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 'double-consciousness' is a concept in social philosophy which refers to an internal conflict experienced by African-Americans as a result of their racialised oppression within the white-dominated and racially-segregated American society.[522] Du Bois argues that African-Americans are forever conscious of their separate identities as Americans and as 'coloured' individuals: "One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body."[523] As a result of this conflict, Du Bois claimed that many African-Americans must live:

> a double life… which gives rise to a painful self-consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality and a moral hesitancy…[which produces] a peculiar wrenching of the soul...Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals.[524]

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[520] Bower, *"Color Struck" Under the Gaze,* p.13

[521] In his definition of schizophrenia, Laing describes the symptoms of an 'ontologically insecure' patient as exhibiting an 'unembodied' self, and posits that psychoanalysis should focus on how "individuals perceive themselves in relation to the world around them and how society's perception of them influence their sense of being in the world." *Ibid.,* pp.3-4

[522] John P. Pittman, "Double Consciousness,", *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.) http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/double-consciousness Last accessed 1 November 2016

[523] DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, p.2

[524] *Ibid.* p.122

Considering this rhetoric of a 'double-ness," comparisons can be made between Du Bois's theory and the experience of mixed-race Americans who sometimes encountered hostility on both sides of the colour line due to their mixed-racial status. While Du Bois himself may not have been speaking to a sense of duality within African-American communities regarding skin colour or racial mixture, it can be argued that writers such as Johnson re-contextualised Du Bois's 'double-consciousness' theory to explore the lived reality of miscegenation. Indeed, it will be shown that Johnson's use of key words such as 'warring' throughout her creative works, particularly her poetry, seem to suggest that she was engaging with Du Bois's notion of double consciousness while also reflecting on the extent to which this concept was further shaped by gender.

With that in mind, this section will analyse Johnson's creative work alongside that of Zora Neale Hurston, and Alice Dunbar-Nelson, to determine how the mixed-race mind and body were artistically depicted by women of mixed-racial heritage. These women have been carefully selected for this study because they all lived through the social and cultural reconfigurations which characterised the opening decades of the twentieth century. Moreover, each of these women wrote creative texts about racial hybridity during the New Negro Renaissance, at a time when notions of race, gender, hybridity, and sexuality were being reconfigured. Examining the creative outputs of these writers, and placing their words in conversation with each other, will not only offer a fresh perspective on this well-examined artistic movement, but also reveal the ways in which these mixed-race women responded to intersecting systems of social oppression.

"Many Negroes have Colorphobia as badly as the White Folk have Negrophobia"[525] Portrayals of Colourism/Intraracial Prejudice in Dramatic Works

Of all the women analysed within this study, Georgia Douglas Johnson arguably wrote the most prolifically on the issue of mixed-racial identity. Originally referred to as the 'lady poet' of the Harlem Renaissance, scholars now agree that Johnson was, among other things, a gifted playwright and ardent anti-lynching activist.[526] Poetry was, however, where her literary career began and as such, it is important to recognise the ways in which her poems informed her early thinking and creative exploration of racial inequality, social justice,

[525] Nannie Helen Burroughs quoted in: Peiss, *Hope in a Jar,* p.207
[526] Johnson has been remembered as a poet, but over the past twenty years theatre historians and black feminist critics have revised and nuanced this status. For an analysis of Johnson's contribution to the lynching drama genre, see: Mitchell, *Living with Lynching*; and Stephens, 'Politics and Aesthetics, Race and Gender,' p.251

and mixed-race identity. Over the course if her adult life, she published four poetry collections: *The Heart of a Woman* (1918), *Bronze* (1922), *An Autumn Love Cycle* (1928), and *Share My World* (1962). Of all her collections, the poems within *Bronze* signified a specific engagement with the issue of race, with many focussing on the existence of mixed-race individuals in the context of the United States.

Literary historian Teresa Zackodnik has noted that the mulatta figure was used by writers of the 'New Negro' Renaissance as a tool to condemn societal norms and expectations.[527] Building on Zackodnik's observation, it can be contended that Johnson's poems similarly tapped into this literary approach. Her poem 'The Octoroon,' for instance demonstrates the way in which Johnson used the 'mulatta' to critique American society:

> One drop of midnight in the dawn of life's pulsating stream
> Marks her an alien from her kind, a shade amid its gleam;
> Forevermore her step she bends insular, strange, apart –
> And none can read the riddle of her wildly warring heart.
>
> The stormy current of her blood beats like a mighty sea
> Against the man-wrought iron bars of her captivity.
> For refuge, succor, [sic] peace and rest, she seeks that humble fold
> Whose every breath is kindliness, whose hearts are purest gold.[528]

Within this poem, Johnson not only spoke to the experience of a woman with mixed-racial heritage by highlighting that the "shade" of her skin "marks her an alien" within her environment, but attributed this and the subject's "wildly warring heart" to the racially-segregated system which dominated American society. In particular, the "one drop of midnight" which opens the poem can clearly be linked to the infamous "one-drop" rule, which dictated that one drop of 'Negro' blood categorised a person 'colored,' and was used to uphold the system of legal segregation. Furthermore, that Johnson framed the captivity of the poem's subject against the "man-wrought iron bars" highlights Johnson's critique of what she viewed as man-made legislation and societal frameworks which work to subjugate people, and particularly women, of colour. The characteristics of the poem's 'Octoroon' can all be linked to the stereotype that women of mixed-race were deemed 'tragic' outsiders, unable to

[527] Zackodnik, *The Mulatta and the Politics of Race*, p.136
[528] Georgia Douglas Johnson, 'The Octoroon,' *Bronze: A Book of Verses*, (Boston, B.J. Brimmer Company, 1922) p.36

psychologically cope with their 'conflicting' genes, and is a theme that Johnson repeated throughout *Bronze*, and the poetry she published during the early to mid-1920s. For instance, the poem 'Aliens' explored the idea that behind their smiles, mixed-race individuals conceal an inner turmoil:

> They seem to smile as others smile, the masquerader's art
> Conceals them, while, in verity, they're eating out their heart,
> Betwixt the two contending stones of crass humanity
> They lie, the fretted fabric of a dual dynasty.
>
> A single drop, a sable strain debars them from their own, –
> The other – fold them furtively, but God! they are alone…[529]

The poem 'Cosmopolite' similarly explored the notion of an 'alien' within the landscape of a community in its opening lines: "Not wholly this or that / But wrought / Of alien bloods am I, / A product of the interplay / Of travelled hearts," while the poem 'Fusion' repeated the term 'warring' with the line: "I trace within my warring blood."[530]

It can be argued that Johnson's poems constituted a creative outlet for her to think out loud about racial issues before committing her thoughts to dramatic playscripts. Three years after publishing *Bronze,* 'The Riddle' appeared in Alain Locke's *New Negro* anthology in 1925. Within 'The Riddle,' Johnson explored the issue of 'miscegenation' by instructing readers to: "Unriddle this riddle of outside-in / White men's children, in black men's skin."[531] One year later, in 1926, Johnson released a play which explored the complex emotional and psychological implications of interracial sexual exploitation, and intraracial colourism.[532] *Blue Blood* presented a striking narrative that is not 'tragic' in the sense that it features the death of its mixed-race characters, but does depict two African-American mothers who suffer from an internalised conflict that is never resolved, as well as a mixed-race women who is left emotionally destitute.[533] The play is set within Mrs. Bush's kitchen on the morning of her light-skinned daughter's wedding to Mrs. Temple's light-skinned son. Each of the mothers

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[529] Johnson, 'Aliens,' *Bronze: A Book of Verses*, pp.37-38
[530] Johnson, 'Cosmopolite,' *Bronze: A Book of Verses*, p.59; and Johnson, 'Fusion,' *Bronze: A Book of Verses*, p.60
[531] The Riddle. Georgia Douglas Johnson Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Box 162-7, Folder 10. See also: Georgia Douglas Johnson, 'The Riddle,' in Alain Locke's (ed.) *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* (New York, First Touchstone Edition, 1925; 1997) p.147
[532] Hull, *Color, Sex, and Poetry,* p.19
[533] Georgia Douglas Johnson, *Blue Blood*, (1926) Reprinted in Kathy A. Perkins, *Black Female Playwrights: An Anthology of Plays before 1950*, (Indiana, 1990) pp.38-46

express pride in the physical appearance of their respective children, but soon argue over whose child has the highest level of 'blue blood' in their veins. Through a bitter irony, it becomes clear that the two women were raped by the same white banker. What began as a comedic display of 'one-upmanship' was quickly at risk of descending into an incestuous tragedy, but Johnson returned the play to a sense of jest by ending the play with the dark-skinned and lovelorn Randolph Strong proposing to Mrs. Bush's daughter, thus preserving the dignity of both mothers. Through this cleverly-crafted dilemma Johnson exposed a multitude of psychological repercussions that occurred following the sexual exploitation of African-American women. When it became evident that they had both been subject to the same abuse, the women recognised that they must each stay silent to avoid the possibility that Mrs. Temple's son be lynched for trying to seek retribution or defend their honour. Mrs. Bush poignantly declares that they must: "Keep it from him. It's the black women that have got to protect their men from the white men by not telling on 'em."[534]

By giving a fictional voice to women caught in this horrific predicament, Johnson exposed the pervasive effects of the sexual exploitation inflicted by white men against African-American women. In her painful recollection of the incident, Mrs. Temple explained that: "there wasn't any one there that cared enough to help me, and you know yourself…what little chance there is for women like us…to get justice."[535] She explains that after the attack, she lied about the rapist's identity for fear that her fiancé would try to avenge her but, now married, she must live with a husband who can never know her son's true paternity. Johnson posits that while the psychological ramifications of this exploitation have clearly endured for decades, it will also linger for generations to come. After finding out the truth about her true parentage, Mrs. Bush's daughter, May, exclaims: "I've kept out of their clutches myself, but now it's through you, Ma, that they've got me anyway."[536] That May also feels violated by white men, reveals Johnson's intent to show that coerced miscegenation was also emotionally-painful for the children of such unions, and could influence their psychological wellbeing. Moreover, it can be argued that by speaking to the tortuous results of sexual violence, not only inflicted upon the women subjected to the assault but also their children and descendants, Johnson highlighted the sustained generational trauma of knowing that somewhere within one's lineage, an ancestor had been violated.

[534] *Ibid.* p.46
[535] *Ibid.* p.43
[536] *Ibid.* p.45

In 1930, four years after releasing *Blue Blood*, Johnson published *Blue Eyed Black Boy,* a lynching drama similarly linked to the miscegenation theme.[537] Again, the dramatic action of the play is set within the kitchen of an African-American woman named Mrs. Waters. As the play opens news arrives that her blue-eyed son Jack has been arrested for brushing up against a white woman on the street. Hearing that a white mob are going to "break open the jail and string him up," the Waters family fret over what course of action to take.[538] Realising what she must do, Mrs. Waters retrieves an old ring and tells her daughter's fiancé to take it to the Governor, instructing that he explain a mob is going to lynch her son, "born twenty-one years ago."[539] It then becomes clear to the audience, but not the characters, that Jack is the Governor's mixed-race son. While rape drove the action of *Blue Blood*, it is instead inferred that the interracial union in *Blue-Eyed Black Boy* was consensual. As the family pace the kitchen waiting for news, Mrs. Waters breaks into an audible but concealed prayer: "Lord Jesus, I know I've sinned against your holy law, but you did forgive me and let me hold up my head again… Let his father – you understand all, I mean sweet Jesus – come down and rise with this wild mob tonight."[540] As hoped for, the Governor sends troops to protect his son, and the play ends without tragedy.

Throughout both *Blue Blood*, and *Blue Eyed Black Boy,* Johnson reveals the various and complex psychological torments that can be attached to the issue of miscegenation. The mothers' comedic argument in *Blue Blood* over whose light-skinned child is 'superior' critiqued the existence of colourism within African-American communities which placed prestige on fair physiological features, and ignored the historical and continued sexual exploitation of black women at the hands of white men. By revealing the hypocrisy of this superficial pride, alongside May's woeful proclamation that she has been 'genetically-violated,' Johnson alluded to the painful disdain which could sometimes be attached to possessing mixed-racial heritage. Four years after writing *Blue Blood* however, Johnson created a character whose situation was improved as a direct result of his racial heritage. Indeed, it is ultimately Jack's mixed-blood that saves him from the lynch mob; a new and arguably intentional critique that Johnson was keen to propagate. Although Jack was saved from near-tragedy because of his white heritage, it is unclear whether the Governor will now

[537] Georgia Douglas Johnson, *Blue Eyed Black Boy*, (1930) Reprinted in Kathy A. Perkins, *Black Female Playwrights: An Anthology of Plays before 1950*, (Indiana, 1990) pp.47-51
[538] *Ibid.* p.49
[539] *Ibid.,* p.50
[540] *Ibid.* p.51

recognise him as his son and improve his chances in life, or if after this scrape with death Jack will remain at the mercy of white America. This uncertainty can be linked back to Johnson's 1925 poem, 'The Riddle,' where she asked readers to "unriddle this riddle" of "white men's children, in black men's skin."[541] By complicating the narrative to this extent, and leaving Jack's future uncertain, Johnson explored the complex reality of interracial relations during this time, and subtly underlined the inconsistent ways in which mixed-racial heritage was both experienced and policed during the early twentieth century.

While Johnson went on to publish another book of poetry, *An Autumn Love Cycle* (1928), her work in the 1960s is particularly noteworthy, as it demonstrates a shift in Johnson's approach to promoting civil rights. Her final book of poems, *Share My World,* published in 1962 focused on fostering forgiveness, supporting the unity of humankind, and advocating love. While these were themes that she undoubtedly supported throughout her life, a particular shift in her stance when writing about mixed-race heritage is significant.

The poem 'Tomorrow's Sun Shall Shine,' for instance, speaks to the subject of mixed-racial heritage, but moves away from the language used in earlier works, and instead takes a more positive outlook: "No, no, I live in no half-world, / Nor do I feel deprived; / The earth and all its blood are mine…/ Within my body bloods of earth / Assemble and combine; / For me tomorrow's fervid sun / Shall dawn, shall rise, shall shine!"[542] Within Johnson's archive lie several drafts of the unpublished poem 'Interbred,' dated 1964, which similarly speaks to the cosmopolitan idea that many "essences" exist within the poem's subject:

> I am the sum of many lands
> Within my heart, within my hands
> The tributary forces flow
> In one tremendous undertow.
>
> No puny measure times the beat
> Of my precursal, charging feet.

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[541] Johnson, 'The Riddle,' Georgia Douglas Johnson Papers, Box 162-7, Folder 10; and Johnson, The *New Negro,* p.147

[542] 'Tomorrow's Sun Shall Shine,' Georgia Douglas Johnson Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Box 162-8, Folder 3

All essences resolve in me
Like rivers rushing to the sea![543]

Another poem, entitled 'International' and dated 1965, also portrays mixed-race heritage in a triumphant tone, and promotes the notion of racial integration, through phrases such as "intermingling:"

Come all nations let us gather
Like one triumphal band
Intermingling, understanding,
Moving Godward, hand in hand.

Hatred, war and wild confusion
Hang about us like a pall
Unity alone can save us
Disunited, we must fall.[544]

The idea that interracial cooperation, and potentially even relationships, could lead to a more harmonious society appears to be a recurring theme throughout Johnson's later poetry. Indeed, as with the poems outlined above, the opening paragraph of her poem "Let's Get Together" attests: "No more your race, no more mine, / Let's get together and the two combine, / We'd be much stronger, happier too / If we went marching two by two."[545] Within this poem not only does Johnson raise the possibility of interracial cooperation, but it could be construed that her use of the term 'combine' suggests racial hybridity, and therefore that Johnson actively promoted interracial relationships as a way to tackle oppression; or that she was endorsing an early form of post-racialism.

The evolution of her poetry from "warring blood" to "I live in no half world" could be attributed to her introduction to the Baha'i faith, but the context of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement may be more significant.[546] It was shown in Chapter One that the notion of

[543] 'Interbred,' Georgia Douglas Johnson Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Box 162-5, Folder 31. (15 January 1964)
[544] 'International,' Georgia Douglas Johnson Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Box 162-5, Folder 31. (13 January 1965)
[545] *Let's Get Together*. Georgia Douglas Johnson Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Box 162-6, Folder 3. Another copy of this poem can also be found in Box 162-8, Folder 7 under the title 'We Trip Each Other.'
[546] Valerie Jean claims that Johnson's change in approach was due to her introduction to the Baha'i faith. Valerie Jean, 'Georgia Douglas Johnson,' Memory and Influence: A History of DC Poets: Special Memorial Issue, *Beltway Poetry Quarterly,* Vol. 4, No.4 (Fall 2003)

'colored cosmopolitanism' increasingly gained popularity over the course of the early twentieth century. As leaders of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement spoke of global and interracial unity in the pursuit of racial equality, the diverse racial heritage of individual African-American communities became less pertinent. Therefore, the tradition of using mixed-race heritage as a means to critique white oppression was no longer relevant. Johnson's poems similarly reflect the rhetoric of the 1960s, and a focus on the strength that can come from interracial contact rather than an emphasis on the peculiarities of being the "fretted fabric of a dual dynasty."[547] Her poetry can therefore be recognised as a way in which Johnson responded to popular rhetoric and literary traditions within the context of her time, and it is possible to speculate that had she lived beyond the 1960s, she may also have written plays which addressed her new thinking.

While Johnson's poetry and drama constituted an important contribution to the narrative on colourism, particularly during the 1920s to 1930s, she was not alone in her depiction of intraracial colour preference. Arguably the most well-known creative writer of the women examined in this chapter, both at the time and since, was Zora Neale Hurston, and she too published pieces that challenged and critiqued this phenomenon. It was shown earlier that Hurston published a number of autobiographical texts alongside her anthropological research, however she also produced a number of creative pieces which received mixed critical reception. Hurston's first play, *Color Struck: A Play in Four Scenes* (1925), explores the multifaceted effects that the existence of mixed-race bodies can have within African-American communities, by highlighting the complex reality of colourism and intraracial prejudice.[548] Instead of solely depicting a 'tragic mulatto' woman who is the victim of white men because of her light skin, Hurston reveals the diverse ways that colourism can cut.

The play begins in a railway coach and features several members of an African-American community from 'A Southern City,' later revealed as Jacksonville, Florida, making their way to a cake-walking competition. One couple, Emma and John, missed the streetcar to the railway station because Emma accused John of smiling at a 'mulatto' woman named Effie. As the couple discuss the issue aboard the train, the dark-skinned Emma discloses a fear that her fair-skinned partner John will leave her for a light-hued woman: "Jes the same every time you sees a yaller face, you *takes* a chance."[549] This concern consumes Emma's

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[547] Johnson, 'Aliens,' *Bronze: A Book of Verses*, pp.37-38
[548] Hurston, *Color Struck,* pp.89-102
[549] *Ibid.,* p.91

every thought throughout the journey, and later at the festivity itself. At the competition, Effie offers John and Emma some of her pie but Emma rudely refuses. John politely accepts and asks her to join them, but after Effie nervously declines and walks away, Emma argues to John: "…youse jus' hog-wile ovah her cause she's half-white!"[550] Then, when Emma and John are announced as the best cake-walkers, Emma refuses to go through to the hall because "all them girls is going to pulling and hauling on you."[551] When John goes through regardless, Emma cries: "Oh – them yaller wenches! How I hate 'em! They gets everything they wants," before complaining that: "them half whites, they gets everything…The men, the jobs – everything!"[552] Emma refuses to go into the hall and commence the winner's dance with John, and so Effie takes her place. The final scene takes place in a small shack twenty years later, after John finally reunites with Emma. He asks for her hand in marriage, but sees a small, sick and 'mulatto' girl – Emma's daughter – groaning on a bed in the corner. Noticing her complexion, John teases: "Talkin' 'bout *me* liking high-yallers – *yo* husband musta been pretty near *white*."[553] John persuades Emma to fetch a doctor but on her return, she sees John blotting the girl's forehead and overreacts, claiming that he could never resist a fair complexion: "I knowed it! A half white skin."[554] John's final words as he leaves, disappointed with the jealous woman he had loved for twenty years, are arguably one of the underlying messages of the story: "So this is the woman I've been wearing over my heart like a rose for twenty years! She so despises her own skin that she can't believe any one else could love it!" The play ends as a doctor walks in and pronounces the young girl dead. When questioned about why he had not been called sooner, Emma simply replies "Couldn't see."[555]

There is a subtle significance to Emma's last lines in this play. Literary critic Martha Bower reads the notion that Emma 'couldn't see' as a clear example of a psychological disorder, namely a schizophrenic personality. Arguing that John's remarks about Emma's involvement with a "pretty near white" man would have triggered an internal crisis in Emma, Bower contends that Emma would have objectified those people at the core of her colour complex, including her very light-skinned daughter. If her daughter is now deemed a mere object, Bower claims that there is no need for Emma to rush for the doctor as "there are no

[550] *Ibid.,* p.95
[551] *Ibid.,* p.96
[552] *Ibid.*
[553] *Ibid.,* p.100
[554] *Ibid.,* p.102
[555] *Ibid.,* p.102

feelings of guilt or sorrow."[556] Reading Emma's loss of sight as more than a literal loss of vision but rather a metaphorical, signifyin'[g] trope, Bower claims: "Emma's blindness to John's innocence and true love for her and her unwillingness to go for a doctor upon his entreaties are at the root of her self-destruction."[557] Citing Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation*, Bower maintains that among the characteristics of madness, "one of the distinctive features is blindness arising from our illusions and passions carried to the extreme."[558] However, while appreciating the value of Bower's interpretation, it can be argued that the emphasis on reading psychological disorder to this extent is somewhat hyperbolic. Instead, it must be recognised that it was Emma's colour prejudice, the result of a lifetime of local, societal-based values, which metaphorically blinded Emma's perception and cost her the life of her child. While Hurston's narrative does expose the complex, albeit sensationalist, psychological implications of colourism, it is an overstatement to reduce Hurston, and by extension her fictional characters, to the stereotype of the psychologically-unstable 'coloured-other' as Bower does.

Hurston's fictional portrayal of mixed-race bodies and intraracial prejudice within *Colour Struck,* is highly significant because she subverts the conventional colourism narrative in multiple ways. Firstly, Hurston disrupts the typical gendered and hierarchical assumptions associated with intraracial prejudice by focussing the main thrust of the plot on a light-skinned male character who seeks a dark wife, and a dark-skinned woman drawn to lighter-skinned men. This goes against the traditional sequence of events in 'colour-conscious' plots of the period, which generally tended to focus on the preference African-American men allegedly had for lighter-hued women. That said, Hurston does not entirely negate the existence of such narratives. Indeed, the opening action of the play surrounds the unwanted attention Effie receives from two men. When one of the men, Dinky, puts his hand on Effie's shoulder she immediately reminds him of his partner Ada: "Take yo' arms from 'round me, Dinky! Gwan hug yo' Ada!" Dinky's reply: "Do you think I'd look at Ada when Ah got a chance tuh be wid you?" is quickly cut short when it is made known that Ada is boarding the train, and Dinky jumps up from beside Effie to meet her.[559] Secondly, as Faedra Chatard Carpenter as noted, Hurston dramatises the bilateral nature of colour prejudice by showing

[556] Bower, *"Color Struck" Under the Gaze,* p.44
[557] *Ibid.*
[558] *Ibid*
[559] Hurston, *Color Struck,* p.90

that that John and Emma are both 'colour struck,' albeit in opposing ways.[560] More specifically, Emma is drawn to the light skin of John, and presumably her daughter's fair father; while John's preference for dark-skinned women lead to him actively pursuing a wife that 'was jus' as much' like Emma as possible. Colourism was not necessarily a one-way street where all members of every African-American community favoured light-skinned blacks, nor where all light-skinned blacks rejected their darker 'brethren.'[561]

Building on this observation, Faedra Chatard Carpenter critiques David Krasner's 2002 interpretation of *Color Struck*, in which he argues that John's pursuit of light-skinned women kept Emma in a 'constant state of jealousy,' before suggesting that John eventually marries the light-skinned Effie despite John's comments to the contrary.[562] Carpenter however contends that Krasner's interpretation on the issue of colourism can "easily recapitulate old assumptions regarding the cultural capital of light and dark skin," and argues that such an analysis "reinforces a social hierarchy that imagines light skin as unquestionably superior, thus failing to consider the multivalent dynamics of colorism within the black community."[563] This important point speaks to one of the main contentions of this study: that it is imperative to challenge preconceptions that light, mixed-race skin was always and automatically privileged.[564]

By putting Hurston's work in conversation with other writers, such as Alice Dunbar-Nelson, however, it becomes evident that her strategy was not exceptional. Indeed, Hurston's decision to disrupt the typical gendered and racially hierarchical assumptions associated with intraracial prejudice, and to challenge the notion that light-skinned women were inevitably favoured, can be compared to Dunbar-Nelson's play 'Gone White.'[565] In a story which echoes Hurston's narrative of 'star-crossed' love, 'Gone White' similarly explores the social impediments which emerge when a light-skinned man falls in love with a darker-skinned woman. Using a fair-skinned male as the protagonist, the play centres on Allan, who aspires to be an engineer but cannot attain a job despite his qualifications. His aunt writes a letter to Anna, the dark-skinned woman he wishes to marry, claiming that "Allan can make a career

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[560] Faedra Chatard Carpenter, 'Addressing "The Complex"-ities of Skin Color: Intra-Racism and the Plays of Hurston, Kennedy, and Orlandersmith,' *Theatre Topics*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2009) p.22
[561] *Ibid.*
[562] *Ibid;* and David Krasner, *A Beautiful Pageant: African American Theatre, Drama, and Performance in the Harlem Renaissance, 1910–1927*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2002) p.116
[563] Carpenter, 'Addressing "The Complex"-ities of Skin Color,' p.22
[564] *Ibid.*
[565] Alice Dunbar, 'Gone White,' in Gloria T. Hull's (ed.) *The Works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*, Volume 3, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1988), pp.250-280

for himself, if he will step aside from his race, and he knows it… A girl of your complexion and class would be only a hindrance to him. If you love Allan, you will dismiss him from your life."[566] Acting on the pleas of Allan's aunt, Anna abandons their relationship. Allan moves away to 'go white,' and during this time not only attains a prestigious career but also marries a white woman. Anna however marries John, a sickly black man with whom she is in an unhappy marriage. When Allan and Anna meet again by chance twelve years later, Allan declares an everlasting love for her and pleads that she run away with him. His meddling aunt interferes again, however, and suggests that Allan maintain his respected position but persuade Anna to become his mistress. Upset that Allan now deems this an acceptable way to continue their relationship, Anna refuses him and returns to save her marriage. Within this play colourism appears to permeate the entire community, as it is not just Allan's aunt who voices her cynicism about the relationship, but Anna's granny also has her own concerns: "Lover! SHE thinks they're lovers, but he'll not marry her. He's making a fool of her. No man as white as that is going to marry a brown girl. And if he does, there'll be misery! Misery!"[567]

Johnson, Hurston and Dunbar-Nelson all approached the issue of intraracial colourism in distinct ways, yet all with the same aim of critiquing its existence. Dunbar-Nelson's technique, however, is significant in its own right, as she produced a unique body of creative works which exposed the multiplicity of mixed-racial identity in the United States, by honing in on the multifaceted experience of life in New Orleans.

The Exceptional Reality of Race in New Orleans

Alice Dunbar-Nelson began her literary career in 1895, when she published a collection of short stories, essays and poetry entitled *Violets and Other Tales*, before releasing *The Goodness of St Rocque and Other Stories* with the major publisher Dodd, Mead and Company, in 1899.[568] Although *Violets* was published before her marriage to Paul Dunbar, many contemporary readers and recent scholars have credited her writing success entirely to her husband's influence. While some assumed *The Goodness of St Rocque* was Dunbar-Nelson's literary debut, and deemed her entry into literature as worthy of note, others outright accused her of using Paul's spotlight for her own gains. One writer for the New York

[566] *Ibid.* pp.256-257
[567] *Ibid.* p.254
[568] Moore, *Violets and Other Tales*; and James Nagel, *Race and Culture in New Orleans Stories: Kate Chopin, Grace King, Alice Dunbar-Nelson & George Washington Cable*, (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2014) p.90

Evening Sun, for instance, cynically wrote in 1900: "Wives of great men are many of them reminding us nowadays of their position… Mrs Paul Lawrence Dunbar appears in print to the extent of several stanzas – not through any machinations of the Muse or inspiration from Pegasus plainly – but because she is Mrs Paul Lawrence Dunbar… Was there ever such a short cut to fame as this?"[569] Literary scholar James Nagel highlights that as Dodd, Mead and Company was also Paul Dunbar's firm, their marriage would have played at least some role in *The Goodness of St Rocque* appearing with that publisher, before adding that their connection would have been "instrumental in generating public interest in Alice's volume of interconnected stories."[570] Pointing to the key differences in the style of their works, and awarding Dunbar-Nelson's technique the credit for her success, Anne Razy Gowdy argues that rather than adhere to the stereotyped black dialect that Paul Dunbar had helped to popularise, Dunbar-Nelson instead creates characters who defy the overworked racial caricatures common in post-Civil War literature.[571] While it can be argued that Dunbar-Nelson may indeed have received some advantages from her marriage to Paul, these gains could be seen as compensation for the obstructions that would have accompanied her race and gender at the turn of the century.[572] Regardless of whether or not Dunbar-Nelson had a 'leg-up,' it will be shown that when her work is judged on its own terms, Dunbar-Nelson created a unique body of creative works which exposed the multifaceted experiences of mixed-racial identity in New Orleans in the post-Reconstruction, pre-war period. While *Violets* does have some interesting works within it, only three of the stories, 'Titee,' 'A Carnival Jangle,' and 'Little Miss Sophie' are relevant to the analytical parameters of this thesis, and as they are later reworked and republished in *The Goodness of St Rocque*, analysis will focus on the fourteen interconnected stories within *The Goodness of St Rocque*.

It has been argued by scholars such as Gloria T. Hull and Jurgen Grandt, that Dunbar-Nelson's creative works were 'aracial' publications, devoid of any racial markers or explicit social and political commentary.[573] However, when Dunbar-Nelson's work is placed within the local context of New Orleans, it becomes apparent that her concept of identity and race

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[569] The New York *Evening Sun,* October 11, 1900. Also quoted in Gloria T. Hull, *Color, Sex, And Poetry*, p.49
[570] Nagel, *Race and Culture in New Orleans Stories,* p.90
[571] Anne Razy Gowdy, 'Alice Dunbar-Nelson,' *The History of Southern Women's Literature*, Eds. Carolyn Perry and Mary Weaks-Baxter. (Baton Rouge, LSU Press, 2000) pp.226-227
[572] Gloria Hull also makes this point in Hull, *Color, Sex, And Poetry*, p.50
[573] For instance, in his analysis of Dunbar-Nelson's early work, Jurgen Grandt concedes that "located at the intersection of the genteel and the local-color traditions, [Dunbar-Nelson's early stories] remained for the most part devoid of any explicit social commentary or even racial markers." He then maintains "it is only on the surface that her stories eschew social and racial issues." Jurgen Grandt, 'Rewriting the Final Adjustment of Affairs: Culture, Race, and Politics in Alice Dunbar-Nelson's New Orleans,' *Short Story*, 9.1 (2001) pp.46-47

was in fact informed by the city's unique racial history.[574] Kristina Brooks, Elizabeth J. West and James Nagel have separately emphasised the significance of recognising that Dunbar-Nelson's personal experience of New Orleans's tripartite social stratification informed her creative writing.[575] Brooks argues that the staple of antebellum New Orleans society, the 1808 Louisiana Civil Code which acknowledged the existence of three social sectors—whites, free people of colour, and black slaves, was disrupted by the larger South's post-war insistence on a polarised black-white society.[576] Denied the status previously enjoyed Brooks contends that, unless they chose to pass, many black creoles of the late-nineteenth century were "relegated to the bottom social rung with the larger black New Orleans population."[577] As a mixed-race women herself, Dunbar-Nelson presents a unique interpretation of life during a period of transition in post-Reconstruction Louisiana in which light-skinned creoles of colour were struggling to negotiate their new social and class status.

While at face-value it would appear that Dunbar-Nelson does not explicitly state the race of her characters, she instead relies on a series of coded clues and loaded language to subtly reveal their race and socio-economic position within the locale of New Orleans. Throughout her creative work, she uses specific streets, neighbourhoods and local landmarks such as the Bayou St. John, the Bayou Teche, Mandeville, and New Orleans' Third District, to not only anchor her characters within the diverse and disparate districts of New Orleans, but to also affirm their ethnic identity.[578] For instance, although the race of title character in the short story 'Titee' is not revealed, the fact that his friends are described as "little Creole and Spanish fellows, with dark skins," suggests he was a Creole of colour rather than one of the white Creoles of the French Quarter.[579] This suggestion is further cemented at the end of the story when Titee is laid to rest in St Rocque's cemetery. To briefly explain, the story focuses on Titee's physical changes and it becomes clear that he has been carrying food in his pockets to a starving old man along the railway tracks, sacrificing his own breakfast and dinner. One day Titee breaks his leg but because of the 'cold and rain, and the broken leg' he dies and is buried in St Rocque's cemetery. This location in itself is highly significant, not

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[574] Elizabeth J. West, 'Religion, Race, and Gender in the 'Race-less' Fiction of Alice Dunbar-Nelson,' *English Faculty Publications*, Paper 16, (2009) p.4

[575] Kristina Brooks, 'Alice Dunbar-Nelson's Local Colors of Ethnicity, Class, and Place,' *MELUS*, Vol. 23, No.2 (1998) pp.3-26; and West, 'Religion, Race, and Gender in the 'Race-less' Fiction of Alice Dunbar-Nelson,' pp.1-28

[576] Brooks, 'Alice Dunbar-Nelson's Local Colors of Ethnicity, Class, and Place,' p.4

[577] West, 'Religion, Race, and Gender in the 'Race-less' Fiction of Alice Dunbar-Nelson,' p.4

[578] Brooks, 'Alice Dunbar-Nelson's Local Colors of Ethnicity, Class, and Place,' p.3

[579] Nagel, *Race and Culture in New Orleans Stories,* p.92

only because the historic Saint Rocque was said to cure the disabled, but also because this Third District cemetery further confirms Titee's racial identity.[580]

Colloquial racial signifiers are also used by Dunbar-Nelson to signpost her characters' physical and racial identity. In the short story 'Little Miss Sophie,' the protagonist's race is not clearly stated, but is instead implied through the comments made about her by male characters. For instance, unaware that the woman at the centre of their gossip is sitting nearby, Sophie overhears passengers on a street-car gossiping about her lover Neale's "little Creole love-affair" with his "dusky-eyed fiancée."[581] To a reader versed in New Orleans culture, the words 'dusky-eyed' would have signified that Sophie was a quadroon.[582] In addition, as James Nagel has identified, Sophie lives in the Third District with people of mixed-blood and sews at a factory, which was a job that no white woman of the time would have accepted.[583] Deeming 'Little Miss Sophie' the most culturally-significant within *The Goodness of St Rocque*, James Nagel highlights that the racial identity of the story's key characters form a "subtle but crucial element in the psychological orientation of the characters and suggests a back story that explains the conflict."[584] Placing 'Little Miss Sophie' within the 'tragic mulatto' literary tradition, a genre which typically sees wealthy white gentlemen with a mulatto or quadroon mistress, romantically betray or abandon his lover thus leaving her destitute, Nagel draws attention to Dunbar-Nelson's addition of the localised *plaçage* arrangements.[585] West agrees that Sophie's earlier expectations of Neale, especially after he gave her a family heirloom, were rooted in the plaçage arrangement in New Orleans society whereby white men committed themselves to their mixed-race lovers' not through marriage but by providing a house or apartment and a small income.[586] Disputing Jordan Stouck's analysis of the system of plaçage within Dunbar-Nelson's work, Nagel argues that Stouck "mistakenly assumes that black women involved with white men were 'slaves,' which was not the case. Under *Code Noir*, all women in a formal plaçage relationship were declared legally free."[587]

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[580] *Ibid.*
[581] Alice Dunbar-Nelson, 'Little Miss Sophie,' *The Goodness of St Rocque,* (Teddington: Echo Library, 1899;2019) p.54
[582] Violet Harrington Bryan, 'Race and Gender in the Early Works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson,' in *Louisiana Women Writers: New Essays and a Comprehensive Bibliography*, ed. Dorothy H. Brown and Barbara C. Ewell (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992) p.126
[583] Nagel, *Race and Culture in New Orleans Stories,* p.94
[584] *Ibid.* p.93
[585] *Ibid.*
[586] West, 'Religion, Race, and Gender in the 'Race-less' Fiction of Alice Dunbar-Nelson,' p.16
[587] Nagel, *Race and Culture in New Orleans Stories,* p.95

Critiquing the notion that Dunbar-Nelson's work was devoid of social commentary, Elizabeth West contends that Dunbar-Nelson challenges America's paradigm of 'whiteness' as the embodiment of goodness and superiority, instead suggesting that it is "the darker America that holds in earnest America's claims of honor and moral superiority."[588] In her discussion of 'Little Miss Sophie' specifically, West argues that Sophie is "the product of the unspeakable racial legacy" of America, that legacy being the mixed-race population that was primarily the result of white male sexual exploitation. The system of *plaçage* was a phenomenon unique to New Orleans, and was an institution that Dunbar-Nelson portrayed in many of her stories, including 'Sister Josepha.' The story of 'Sister Josepha' revolves around an orphan named Camille who grew up in a convent. Appraising the intentions of the men who visited the convent looking to give a young girl a home, Camille learns that they are not looking for adoptive daughters, but rather sexual partners; and so Camille decides to become a nun, take the name 'Josepha' and await her ordination. Josepha longs to leave the convent, and plans to escape until she overhears Sister Dominica explain to another nun that life would be difficult for Josepha in the outside world "with no name but Camille, no friends, and her beauty." Hearing this, Josepha is reminded that she has no identity nor any connections outside the convent, and so resolves to stay. West argues that this decision was based on the implication that Josepha's ambiguous racial identity threatened her safety in the outside world.[589] Just as Sophie's race was not openly revealed, neither is the reader explicitly informed that Josepha is a Creole of colour, but rather Dunbar-Nelson again discloses this information through muted references, such as in her description of Sister Josepha's "small brown hands."[590] The significance of Josepha's race is central to the plot, as West points out that knowing that Josepha is a Creole of colour provides a context which allows readers to better understand her decision to remain in the convent: "at the turn of the century, single women dwelling in cities often faced harsh economic and social circumstances. In New Orleans this risk could be amplified for female creoles of color who often found themselves the prey of white men seeking plaçage partners."[591]

Highlighting the significance of this work, West continues that Dunbar-Nelson explores "the shifting social world in turn-of-the-century New Orleans [and] portrays a place where both secular and sacred structures leave women –even white women – subject to the

[588] West, 'Religion, Race, and Gender in the 'Race-less' Fiction of Alice Dunbar-Nelson,' pp.18-19
[589] *Ibid.* p.21
[590] *Ibid.*
[591] *Ibid.*

arbitrary, self-interested will of white male rule."[592] By adopting this technique, Dunbar-Nelson reveals that the virtue of white and near-white women in New Orleans are not threatened by a black male presence, as popular white-authored literature of the time suggested, but rather by the actions of sexually-immoral white men. West concludes that "the absence of black male characters in the tales eliminates the chance that the reader might vilify black manhood, while the "absence of clearly distinguishable black female characters eliminates the possibility that readers might see the stories of love and scorn as mere examples of the black jezebel."[593] Contrary to scholarly analyses which negate the complexity of New Orleans' history of plaçage, this argument shows that Dunbar-Nelson chose to creatively critique the historic experiences of mixed-race women living within New Orleans, as well as address the lingering legacies of such systems at the turn of the twentieth century.

Throughout her creative work, Dunbar-Nelson also presents her stance concerning the history and influence of the Catholic Church in New Orleans. Offering an explanation as to why Dunbar-Nelson's work has received scant attention, Elizabeth West argues that unlike her black female contemporaries, Dunbar-Nelson does not adopt the "sentimental paradigms that seat womanhood in Christian virtue." [594] West continues that throughout her work, Dunbar-Nelson "not only challenges representations of Christianity as redemptive, but more poignantly she explores Christian conventions and ideals as mere enablers of white male hegemony."[595] As New Orleans was a Catholic hub in comparison to the predominantly Protestant population of the rest of the United States, Dunbar-Nelson uses the local specificity of the Catholic Church to give a more general critique of Christianity.[596] Indeed, as Nagel points out, under the *Code Noir* 'people of color' were required to be Roman Catholic in Louisiana, meaning that in order to explore the experiences of these people, Dunbar-Nelson was required to root their stories, at least to some extent, within Catholic conventions.[597]

Furthermore, in the title story of *The Goodness of St Rocque*, Dunbar-Nelson employs African-Christian dualism to paint a realistic picture of the religious lives of people of colour

[592] *Ibid.* pp.23-24
[593] *Ibid.* p.24
[594] *Ibid.* p.5
[595] *Ibid.*
[596] *Ibid.* p.6
[597] Nagel, *Race and Culture in New Orleans Stories,* p.96

in New Orleans, in a story which essentially condemns an intraracial preference for lighter skin. The plot revolves around the dark-skinned Manuela and her quest to secure the heart of Theophilé. At a picnic, Theophilé pays no attention to Manuela, and instead dines and dances with the "blonde and petite" Claralie. Manuela therefore seeks the help of a voodoo woman, referred to as the "Wizened One" who, bearing the hallmarks of a mixed-race woman from the Caribbean, is described as being "yellow" and "turbaned."[598] In a ritual which combines elements of both Christian and voodoo customs, the "Wizened One" says to Manuela: "I give you one lil' charm fo' to ween him back, yaas. You wear h'it 'roun' you' wais', an' he come back. Den you mek prayer at St. Rocque an' burn can'le. Den you come back an' tell me, yaas."[599] Manuela begins the blended novenas for Theophilé's affections, and a few days later she receives a box of bonbons from Theophilé, but it is quickly explained that "being a Creole, and therefore superstitiously careful, and having been reared by a wise and experienced maman to mistrust the gifts of a recreant lover, Manuela quietly thrust bonbons, box, and card into the kitchen fire," before returning to St. Rocque to light the second candle of her novena.[600] At the story's end Manuela is triumphant, as Theophilé seats her to the right of his mother at a party: "when a Creole young man places a girl at his mother's right hand at his own table, there is but one conclusion to be deduced therefrom."[601]

It is significant that Dunbar-Nelson's decided to depict the blended customs practiced by Creoles of colour in New Orleans. Indeed, as Mary Anne O'Neal has pointed out, other authors such as George Washington Cable did creatively portray the unique theological mixture in New Orleans, but Dunbar-Nelson was "the first to treat the subject casually, as an integral part of daily life." [602] Building on this, Nagel contends that without a sense of the specific religious and cultural traditions unique to New Orleans, "there is no way to understand the fundamental conflicts, the religious tensions, and the final significance of the conclusion… It is the local values, the multi-ethnic culture, the richness of the society that gives substance to the events."[603] Again, the significance of Dunbar-Nelson's subtle commentaries and critiques are lost on readers unaware of the coded meanings behind the cultural practices illustrated in her works. This idea even extends to the racial heritage of the

[598] Alice Dunbar-Nelson, 'The Goodness of St Rocque,' *The Goodness of St Rocque,* (Teddington: Echo Library, 1899; 2019) p.5
[599] Dunbar-Nelson, 'The Goodness of St Rocque,' p.6
[600] *Ibid.* p.7
[601] *Ibid. p.8*
[602] Mary Anne O'Neal quoted in Nagel, *Race and Culture in New Orleans Stories,* p.98
[603] *Ibid.* p.97

characters in 'The Goodness of St Rocque.' While Dunbar-Nelson is slightly more explicit in her description of her characters, continually referring to them as "Creoles," their names actually disclose the cultural mix of the local community, with Claralie and Theophilé suggesting a French ancestry and Manuela implying a link to Spain or the Caribbean.[604] This strategy not only highlights the distinct diversity of New Orleans locale, but also draws on the tradition of black female writers to consistently blur and complicate the logic of an easily-definable colour line.

In her appraisal of 'Little Miss Sophie,' Kristina Brooks notes that Dunbar-Nelson's portrayal of Catholicism is "more oppressive than comforting," and that she points to pervasive colour prejudice which leaves "the dark woman metaphorically alone at the altar and literally excluded from the laws of inheritance."[605] While exposing the difficulties experienced by Creole women, and condemning the legacy of plaçage in New Orleans, Dunbar-Nelson's apparent fight for women's rights took a different approach than that of her contemporaries. Indeed, throughout her creative work, Dunbar-Nelson also distances her characters from the turn-of-the-century black literary tradition which focused on black female domesticity and motherhood. Popular African-American writers of the late-nineteenth, early-twentieth century, sought to challenge dominant stereotypes which cast black women as lazy, unloving and uninteresting in creating a stable domestic space.[606]Under the auspice of the NACWC, black clubwomen engaged in what historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has termed "righteous discontent;" a respectable form of resistance that consistently upheld the highest standards of propriety.[607] Black women writers such as Angela Weld Grimké, Myrtle Smith Livingston and Georgia Douglas Johnson, challenged traditional representational politics by creating black characters with the "highest standards of sexual conduct and domestic order" and who adhered to emerging notions of black, middle-class respectability.[608] Defying this tradition, the narrator in Dunbar-Nelson's 'The Woman' instead challenges the supposition that women are naturally bound to the home and domestic sphere.[609] While not completely condemning the institution of marriage, Dunbar-Nelson concludes the story with the sentiment that marriage can be a positive union if each party is

[604] *Ibid.* pp.97-98
[605] Brooks, 'Alice Dunbar-Nelson's Local Colors of Ethnicity, Class, and Place,' p.13
[606] Feimster, *Southern Horrors,* p.165
[607] Mitchell, *Living with Lynching,* p.29; Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, p.108 and pp.180-181; and Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*
[608] *Ibid.,* p.62
[609] West, 'Religion, Race, and Gender in the 'Race-less' Fiction of Alice Dunbar-Nelson,' p.9

independent, and given an opportunity for growth. Again, potentially drawing on her personal experience of marriage, in particular her tumultuous relationship with Paul Dunbar, Dunbar-Nelson highlights the way in which women of colour throughout the period subtly critiqued societal stipulations which effected their everyday lives.

As a mixed-race women raised within the locale of New Orleans, Dunbar-Nelson does present a unique interpretation of life during a period of transition in post-Reconstruction Louisiana. However, it is important to explore how far Dunbar-Nelson's own life experience were reflected in her creative works. It has already been shown that she used her knowledge of New Orleans' local landscape to paint the lives of her fictional characters, but it can also be argued that she integrated autobiographical elements throughout the body of her fictional texts. Her short story, 'The Stones of the Village,' centres on the life of a man named Victor Grabért, whose life has been blighted by his racial ambiguity. As a young boy, Victor is bullied by the boys in his village, and moves to New Orleans to seek a better life. After securing a job in a bookstore by unwittingly 'passing,' the owner dies and bequeaths Victor an inheritance which enables him to attend Tulane College, train as a lawyer and successfully 'pass' into white society. The rest of story addresses the internal conflict that 'passing' has created within Victor and eventually results in his paranoid psychosis and death. While Dunbar-Nelson addresses the popular African-American literary theme of the 'colour line' through Victor's 'passing,' Gloria Hull points out that she tackles the 'tragic mulatto' trope from the unique vantage of the Louisiana black Creole.[610]

Moreover, that this story has autobiographical resonance is clear when compared to her 1929 essay 'Brass Ankles Speaks,' which was explored earlier in this chapter. In particular, links can be drawn between the "miserable" childhood Dunbar-Nelson recalled in this work and that she depicts in Victor. 'The Stones of the Village' opens with Victor being teased by the "derisive laughs and shouts, the taunts of little brutes" within his village.[611] The shouts of "White nigger! White nigger!" experienced by Victor appear to echo the gibes: "Half white nigger! Go on wid ya kind!" which Dunbar-Nelson herself was subjected to.[612] Autobiographical significance can even be read in simple lines such as "Grandmére Grabért laid a sympathetic hand on his black curls."[613] It was highlighted earlier that a central

[610] Hull, 'Introduction,' in Gloria T. Hull's (ed.) *The Works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*, p.xxxiv-xxxv
[611] Alice Dunbar, 'The Stones of the Village,' in Gloria T. Hull's (ed.) *The Works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*, Volume 3, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1988) p.3
[612] *Ibid.* p.5; and Dunbar-Nelson, 'Brass Ankles Speaks,' p.312
[613] Dunbar, 'The Stones of the Village,' p.3

component of Dunbar-Nelson's childhood memories of hallway harassment surrounded her curls, and that her experience of intraracial bullying differed from that of her light-skinned neighbour Charlie, who was allowed to cut his curls while societal expectation proscribed that she must not. Thus, when read alongside her later publication 'Brass Ankles Speaks,' the creative decision to point out Victor's hair exposes Dunbar-Nelson's grasp of both intraracial and gender prejudice. That her neighbour Charlie and her fictional character Victor, could cut their hair to avoid discrimination speaks to a level of freedom that Dunbar-Nelson herself could not attain.[614]

The provincial power wielded by the parents of schoolyard bullies is another issue that Dunbar-Nelson personally experienced, and creatively depicted. While still a young pupil, Dunbar-Nelson claimed that her teachers were powerless to defend the bullied 'fair' children for fear of being reported to the Board of Education by parents of the darker children, and points out that accusations of partiality on account of colour could not be risked by salary-dependent teachers. This apprehension was later understood by Dunbar-Nelson when she herself became a teacher. Arguably based on her own experience, Dunbar-Nelson touches upon the influence parents had in local politics by detailing the power the village's parents had on Victor's life. After his 'Grandmére' insulted the children Victor had been trying to play with, "the parents of the little black and yellow boys… sternly bade them have nothing more to do with Victor."[615] As Victor's story progresses, further similarities can be drawn between the difficulty experienced by Dunbar-Nelson and Victor in making adult friends who could see beyond their fair-skin and mixed-racial heritage. While Victor's experience in the village had made him wary of strangers, Dunbar-Nelson recalled that the predominantly dark-skinned faculty she worked with "measured me with cold contempt and grim derision," and would often rebuff her attempts to be cordial.[616]

One of the key issues that Dunbar-Nelson raises throughout both 'The Stones of the Village' and her autobiographical essay, is the psychological turmoil experienced by fair-skinned, mixed-race Americans who, often as a result of both inter- and intra-racial prejudice, make the decision to 'pass' for white. In the conclusion to 'Brass Ankles Speaks,' Dunbar-Nelson argued that "the 'yaller niggers,' the 'Brass Ankles' must bear the hatred of their own and the prejudice of the white race;" an issue which Dunbar-Nelson chose to creatively

[614] Although not explicitly stated in the story that Victor cuts his curls, it can be assumed that in order to racially pass and avoid suspicion, he does so.
[615] Dunbar, 'The Stones of the Village, p.5
[616] *Ibid.* p.8; and Dunbar-Nelson, 'Brass Ankles Speaks,' pp.317-318

tackle.[617] In 'The Stones of the Village,' Victor 'passes' and although he creates a successful life for himself as a lawyer, he is constantly plagued by the lie he is living. When the white, affluent Vannier family want Victor to marry Elise, he internally questions whether it would be right to marry her, and ponders what would happen if they knew the truth about his heritage: "he saw the dainty girl whom he loved, shrinking from him as he told her of Grandmére Grabért and the village boys. This last thought made him set his teeth hard, and the hot blood rushed to his face."[618]

Several experiences challenge Victor's decision to 'pass,' for instance when a prisoner in court is called a 'nigger,' "the blood rushed to Grabért's face, and he started from his seat angrily. The next instant, he had recovered himself and buried his face in a paper… [He] was tingling with rage and indignation, although the affront had not been given him."[619] In another incident, Victor speaks to a man in a restaurant who tells him a story of a black man who was refused service within the restaurant. When the man explains that "he was a darkey," Victor heatedly responds "Well, what of it? Wasn't he quiet, well-dressed, polite? Didn't he have money?"[620] When the man mockingly questions Victor's sanity, he realises that his unguardedness and impassioned involuntary responses could have dire consequences, and so he resolves that "I must go to the other extreme."[621] Over the years Victor does just that, and establishes a reputation as an unrelenting in his disdain for the 'inferior race.' Now a judge, a case comes up about a fair-skinned black child whose grandmother refused to remove him from the white school he was attending. Victor says "I don't see why these people want to force their children into the white schools… There should be a rigid inspection to prevent it, and all the suspected children put out and made to go where they belong." However his opponent Pavageau who is described as having "a grim brown face," challenges Victor's position by supposing that "Perhaps Your Honour would like to set the example by taking your son from the schools."[622] This incident, "indelibly stamped on [Victor's] memory," shatters his psychological stability, and a sense of paranoia soon ensues: "When he took his judicial seat each morning, it seems that every eye in the courtroom was fastened upon him in derision; every one who spoke, it seemed were but biding their time to shout out the old village street refrain which had haunted him all his life, 'Nigger! – Nigger!

[617] Dunbar-Nelson, 'Brass Ankles Speaks,' pp.320-321
[618] Dunbar, 'The Stones of the Village,' p.16
[619] *Ibid.* p.13
[620] *Ibid.* p.19
[621] *Ibid.*
[622] *Ibid.* p.26

– White nigger!'[623] Victor confronts Pavageau asking how he could have guessed his true heritage, and it is revealed that he was Madam Guichard's nephew, the woman Victor lived with in New Orleans. Although incredibly shaken, Victor details a sense of relief that after years of worry, his fear was finally personified: "…he could not but feel a certain relief that the vague formless fear which had hitherto dogged his life and haunted it, had taken on a definite shape. He knew where it was now; he could lay his hands on it, and fight it."[624] As his turmoil unravels, he muses to himself "Oh, what a glorious revenge he had on those little white village boys! ... he had taken the highest possible position among them… he had taken for his wife the best woman among them all, and she had borne him a son. Ha, ha! What a joke on them all!"[625] At a banquet in his honour, he muses to himself "Fools! Fools! I whom you are honouring, I am one of the despised ones. Yes, I'm a nigger – do you hear, a nigger!"[626] Proving too much for his mind and body, Victor collapses into his seat while trying to give a speech, and the story ends with the declaration that "the secret died with him."[627]

That Dunbar-Nelson emphasised the psychological turmoil faced by Victor is particularly significant when analysed alongside the recollections of her own decision to 'pass' at several times throughout her life. For Dunbar-Nelson, these strategic negotiations of identity often resulted in acute anxiety. Detailing one incident at an Atlantic City cinema, she claimed: "I was conscious of misgivings, and a pounding in my throat when we approached the ticket-taker… I choked with apprehension." After making it home without the humiliation of being exposed, she reflected: "How splendid it must be never to have any apprehension about one's treatment anywhere?"[628]

Considering her own personal experiences of 'passing,' and that she used female characters to critique the complex legacy of plaçage in New Orleans, it is interesting that Dunbar-Nelson chose male characters, rather than female, to spearhead her 'passing' stories. There are several ways that this creative decision could be read. Firstly, it could be argued that this choice reflected her own anxieties about 'passing,' and that by using male characters she employed a creative technique to displace identification with her own biography.

[623] *Ibid.* p.27
[624] *Ibid.* p.29
[625] *Ibid.* p.30
[626] *Ibid.* p.31
[627] *Ibid.* p.33
[628] Dunbar-Nelson, *Give Us Each Day,* p.69

Alternatively, as many 'passing' stories of the period featured female protagonists, which subsequently lead to critique of the practice being framed as a criticism against black women, it could instead be argued that Dunbar-Nelson intentionally flipped the narrative. By casting a male character, and charting the complicated experience he endured, Dunbar-Nelson disrupted black patriarchal critique of black women's decision to 'pass' by crafting a story that black men could identify with. Recognising the various ways in which African-American women were subjugated by both their race and their gender, this creative approach signals Dunbar-Nelson's endeavour to actively reclaim female agency, and expose a broader understanding of the choices made in response to the racial discrimination which plagued the lives of people of colour throughout the early twentieth century.

Conclusion

Building on Chapter One's exploration of the ways in which the mixed-race body was understood and negotiated during the early twentieth century, this chapter has examined the experiences of mixed-race women articulated in their own words. It has complicated existing historiographical analysis by revealing that these women demonstrated a sense of agency and actively responded to misrepresentations of mixed-race women. Moreover, this chapter has shown that by crafting narratives which addressed the hierarchies of colour these women highlighted that physically embodying the legacy of a mixed-race ancestry led to differing, but nonetheless important, experiences both within local African-American communities and the wider American society. Through their encounters with white racism and intra-racial colourism, their words shed light on the distinct experience of being a woman of mixed-racial heritage. Operating in a climate of both racial and gender subjugation, and at a time when the words and actions of African-American women were restricted by middle-class notions of respectability, the fact that each of these women chose to articulate their thoughts, whether explicitly or with veiled candour, is highly significant. By placing the private and public testimony of mixed-race women in conversation with each other, this chapter also offered a new perspective on the cultural and artistic movement known as the New Negro Renaissance. As black culture and black identity were consciously reimagined and redefined, these women published works which challenged the notion of homogeneity and sought to further complicate understandings of how African-American communities functioned.

In a number of ways, each of these women demonstrated how the lived experience for mixed-race Americans varied throughout the period. As the host of the infamous "S Street

Literary Salon," Georgia Douglas Johnson was at the centre of emerging ideologies within Washington DC's black intelligentsia. Her home was an important meeting place for New Negro writers, artists and theorists to exchange and experiment with new ideas, and this chapter has shown that the changing tone of her own work over the course of the twentieth century provides an insight into the shifting ideologies articulated within black intellectual circles. Through her poetry and plays, she used the lived reality of living with mixed-racial heritage as a tool to condemn societal frameworks and legislation which subjugated people, and particularly women, of colour. In addition, she explored the enduring implications of interracial sexual exploitation, and the reality of intraracial colourism.

Similarly, this chapter showed that Zora Neale Hurston also critiqued the phenomenon of colour preference, and the multifaceted effects that the existence of mixed-race bodies had within African-American communities. Her play *Color Struck* subverted the conventional colourism narrative and revealed the various ways that colourism cut, by depicting not only a light-skinned female character subjected to scorn and unwanted male attention, but also a light-skinned male character with a preference for dark-skinned women. Reading Hurston's work alongside that produced by other writers, such as Alice Dunbar-Nelson, highlighted that her strategy was not exceptional. Indeed, Hurston's decision to disrupt the typical assumptions associated with intraracial prejudice, were compared to the creative decisions made throughout Dunbar-Nelson's play 'Gone White.' Moreover, it was shown that as women of colour, Hurston and Dunbar-Nelson, had to placate and navigate the expectations of white patrons and publishers in order to get their work published and ensure continued economic stability. Building on Teresa Zackodnik's phrase, these women 'talked out both sides of their mouths,' and employed a double-voiced discourse to subtly critique the existence of racial hierarchies and discrimination in the United States.

Although a member of the North-Eastern black elite, Alice Dunbar-Nelson's Louisiana roots also added a unique perspective to New Negro literature, as her experience of New Orleans's tripartite social stratification informed her understanding of identity and race, and subsequently influenced her writing. Through her portrayal of social systems and practices, such as racial 'passing' and the lingering legacies of plaçage, her creative work exposed the multifaceted experiences of mixed-race women living within New Orleans at the turn of the twentieth century. Similarly Anita Thompson Dickinson Reynolds's transatlantic experience of race supplemented this thesis by providing an important insight into the way in which a woman of mixed-racial heritage understood and navigated the contours of racial

hierarchy in the United States, France and Morocco. In contrast to the prejudice she experienced in America, she revealed that people of mixed-heritage like herself were highly-regarded, and therefore her testimony placed her experiences of racism within a global context. Moreover, it will be shown in Chapter Three that Reynolds's experience of life outside the United States resonates with that of Philippa Schuyler, who similarly found her identity easier to navigate away from America's distinct articulations of race.

Overall, this chapter has revealed a more thorough picture of the distinct challenges and privileges that came with living as a mixed-race women during the early twentieth century, as articulated by women of mixed-racial heritage themselves. Chapter Three will delve even deeper into the lived reality of existing with dual heritage in the United States. It will hone in more specifically to examine the lives of two biracial women born to white mothers, to reveal the various ways in which the strict binaries of black and white impacted each of their lives.

Chapter 3

"I Live in a Contrasting Black and White World:"[629] The Lived Reality of Mixed-Race Women Raised by White Mothers

[629] Philippa Schuyler, 'My Black and White World,' *Sepia*, June 1962, p.10. Schuyler Family Collection - Philippa Duke Schuyler Series, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, MG63, Box 60 Folder 5

"As you probably know I am the product of both races and as far as I can make out there is little or no choice between them."[630]

While Chapter One analysed the ways in which the phenotypical features associated with biracial female bodies were understood throughout the early-twentieth century, and Chapter Two examined the ways in which women of mixed-racial heritage articulated their lived experience, this chapter will narrow even further in focus to explore a dimension of interracial relationships and mixed-race identity often overlooked by scholars: the lives of biracial daughters born to black men and white women.[631] Building on the testimonies of Chapter Two, this analytical approach is based on the contention that there would have been a discernible difference between knowing that interracial relations had taken place somewhere in your past, but being raised by two parents that identified as African-American, and the experience of being the direct result of a relationship between two people who identified as disparate racial groups. Rather than homogenising the experiences of all women who identified mixed-racial heritage within their ancestry, specifically honing in on the experience of biracial women born to white mothers will further elucidate the complex contours of racial identity during the early twentieth century, and reveal the ways in which these women negotiated them.

Although all forms of interracial intimacy were derided, social and legislative responses varied according to the gender configuration of the union. Indeed whereas sexual relations, consensual or coerced, between white men and black women could, to an extent, be tolerated by white society, the mere suggestion of intimacy between a white woman and a black man could generate violent repercussions.[632] It was shown in the Introduction that this was arguably due to the fact that relationships between white women and black men were perceived to pose a bigger threat to white male hegemony, and the established racial and social order. While the mixed-race children of black women followed the racial status of their mother, meaning that if their mother was enslaved they too would be a slave, the mixed-race children of white women were free.[633] Throughout the seventeenth to early-twentieth century, the majority of biracial and mixed-race Americans were born to black mothers, and more

[630] Angelina Weld Grimké, undated letter to a lady at Hampton, quoted in Hull, *Color, Sex, Poetry,* p.132
[631] Please note that throughout this chapter, the use of first names will be employed where necessary to avoid confusion between subjects who share the same family name.
[632] Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies,* p.76
[633] Sharfstein, *The Invisible Line*, p.49

often than not were the product of sexual coercion. While not suggesting that every mixed-race child born to a white mother and black father was the result of a consensual interaction, as the crime of rape exists across multiple and varied contexts, this chapter will however highlight the distinct experience of forging a mixed-racial identity while being raised by a white mother within a consensual sexual relationship. To have been raised within this racial dynamic meant that an individual's mere existence defied dominant societal norms, in a more discernible and immediate way than those whose mixed-race heritage was the result of an interaction several generations ago.

Taking this into account, this chapter will contain two main case studies, each focussed on the life of a biracial woman born to a white mother and a black father across two different time periods. The first will focus on the life of Angelina Weld Grimké, whose birth in 1880 and formative years in Washington DC meant that she not only witnessed the development of a turn-of-the-century black literary tradition, but also the emergence of eugenics and theories pertaining to 'hybrid degeneracy.' The second case study will examine Philippa Duke Schuyler, born in Harlem over fifty years after Grimké in 1931, and who was heralded as a rebuttal to twentieth-century eugenicist tracts about 'hybrid degeneracy.' These two women have been selected for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, they were both born to a white mother within the institution of marriage. In other words, they did not suffer the same taint of illegitimacy that often effected the lives of biracial and mixed-race Americans who had perhaps been conceived through coerced sex, or whose parents may have been unable to marry due to state miscegenation laws. This seemingly small factor is significant, because despite their 'legitimacy' and the fact that they were born over fifty years apart, neither of them identified as black-white biracial. Interestingly, it will be shown that while Grimké chose to identify as an African-American woman and fully engaged herself with the African-American intelligentsia in Washington DC, Schuyler instead distanced herself from both her white and black heritage by creating a new and exotic identity and passing as an 'Iberian' named Felipa Monterro.[634] Another theme that links the two women is their attitude towards motherhood. During the 1910s and 1920s, Grimké wrote prolifically on the unique pains that burdened black mothers and vowed that she could never bring a child into the racially-segregated world that she was living in. Schuyler also never had a child, but she did fall pregnant in 1964 and decided to have an abortion. It has been suggested by historians such as Daniel McNeil that she had an abortion because she did not want to give

[634] Streeter, *Tragic No More,* p.120

birth to a black man's child.[635] While it is wrong to presume that she had the abortion for that reason alone, her insistence to distance herself from her black heritage and instead 'pass' as Felipa, does need to be considered, as giving birth to a black child would inevitably have inhibited her ability to continue 'passing.' Finally, this chapter will build on Caroline A. Streeter's argument that age is a crucial factor in the perception towards and representation of biracial women.[636] In particular, Streeter identifies that while biracial children were often designated as nonthreatening or mediating 'bridges' between the races, this function acquired completely different overtones with the advent of maturity, when the development of adult sexuality made miscegenation inevitable.[637] With this in mind, it will be shown that age formed a significant catalyst to the major changes in the lives of both Grimké and Schuyler, changes which influenced the negotiation of their biracial identity.

The overall aim of this chapter is, therefore, to shed light on a rarely-examined aspect of interracial relationships during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, and consider the experiences of women born within the particular family dynamic of a white mother and black father.

Angelina Weld Grimké

This case study will focus on the life of Angelina Weld Grimké, the biracial daughter of Sarah Stanley, a white Midwestern writer, and Archibald Grimké, an African-American lawyer. Much of this case study will utilise the extensive correspondence between members of the Grimké and Stanley family. Charting the initial tenderness of the couple's intimacy, the disapproval of Stanley's white family, and then Stanley's realisation that raising a biracial child as a white woman in the United States would be psychologically-challenging for both mother and daughter, these letters provide a fascinating insight into the lived realities of interracial relationships at the end of the nineteenth-century.

Born into slavery near Charleston, South Carolina in 1849, Archibald Henry Grimké was the eldest of three sons to an enslaved woman Nancy Weston, and her master Henry W. Grimké, a member of a large slaveholding family.[638] Recognised by his father, Archibald's

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[635] Daniel McNeil, 'Black Devils, White Saints and Mixed-Race *Femme Fatales*: Philippa Schuyler and the Winds of Change,' Critical Arts: A South-North Journal of Cultural & Media Studies, Vol. 25, No.3 (2011) p.372
[636] Streeter, *Tragic No More,* pp.106-107
[637] *Ibid.*
[638] Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Woman's Rights and Abolition*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967:1998) pp.267-272

formative years were spent within an interracial household as his parents lived together in a common-law relationship, without social denigration. When Henry died, he bequeathed Nancy and his sons to his heir by his first wife, Montague Grimké. Although Henry intended for them to be treated as family, Montague hired Archibald and Francis out as slaves. After the Civil War Henry's half-sisters Sarah and Angelina Grimké, the famed white abolitionists who had left the South during the antebellum era to campaign on an anti-slavery platform, learned of their nephews' existence. They not only acknowledged them as family, but decided to pay for their education.[639] While Francis became a Presbyterian minister, Archibald became a lawyer.

Not much is known about the early life of Sarah Stanley except that her father was a Midwestern Episcopal minister, that she aspired to be a writer, and was interested in mysticism and psychic health. Only one photograph of Stanley survives, but following her marriage to Grimké in 1879, she was described by the media as "a frail, delicate, good-looking young lady, of a high order of intellect, and exceedingly well bred."[640] The couple met in Boston when Grimké was fresh-out of Harvard Law School and Stanley was a 27-year-old graduate of Boston University. After a short, but intensely passionate, period of courting, they decided to get married.[641] As was the case with so many interracial unions, their marriage was abhorred by Stanley's relatives. The extent to which the Stanley family objected to the union is evident in several surviving letters to Stanley from her father, M.C. Stanley, insisting she reconsider. In February 1879, he articulated his disgust and disappointment upon learning his daughter's intentions: "There is not one of us who finds any pleasure in what seems to elate you… it has filled our hearts with mourning… We have always [prided] ourselves in you, but we are sadly, sadly disappointed."[642] Urging Stanley to take more time to consider the marriage, her father went as far as to question her sanity, claiming: "You seem to have lost your reason… I have to ask you for one sane hour to open your eyes and consider the step you are taking."[643] Less than a week later, he wrote again that he is not only "so desolate, disappointed and lonely," but that he now has suicidal thoughts at the horror of his daughter's decision:

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639 *Ibid.* pp.270-272
640 *Dodge City Times*, Kansas. June 21, 1879, p.3
641 Maureen Honey, *Aphrodite's Daughters: Three Modernist Poets of the Harlem Renaissance*, p.73
642 M.C. Stanley to Sarah Stanley Grimké, February 21, 1879. Archibald H. Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 39-1, Folder 5
643 *Ibid.*

> "I am sorrowful beyond measure – I would gladly give my life this moment – yes go with a bounding heart to the scaffold and hang till I am dead, if I could restore you as you were a few months ago – I grieve over it through the day – it is the last thing to fade out of the thoughts in slumber and the first to force its way on awakening."[644]

Interestingly, in his first letter to Stanley, although the language used to describe his condemnation would suggest that the interracial nature of their intended union was a major issue, he did not explicitly mention Grimké's race. Instead, towards the end of his missive he focused his dismay on the fact that Grimké did not follow tradition by introducing himself to the Stanley family or asking permission for Stanley's hand in marriage:

> "I write in no unkindness. You I love, and admire & dote upon, & cherish with all the fondness of a father; and of Mr Grimké I know nothing, and can feel no unkindness, but shall always feel that he has deeply wronged us in plucking our beautiful and cherished fruit without so much as asking our permission, till he supposed he had it safely in his hands."[645]

In his second letter, however, Stanley was much clearer in his aversion to any notion of interracial intimacy. He reminded his daughter of his charitable contribution towards African-American civil rights, claiming "I have advocated every [measure] for their full enfranchisement to civil & religious liberty & the opening of our schools & colleges for their education & culture."[646] Despite this, however, he maintained that "amalgamation always seemed unnatural;" and exploiting the common yet hypocritical sentiment that many white men have articulated throughout history, he elaborated that: "Toward them I [cherish] none but philanthropic feelings but to give them my beautiful & accomplished daughters for wives seems perfectly abhorrent, and that they should be willing to throw themselves into their arms for husbands is an infinite surprise & [grief.]"[647] The Stanley family were not alone in their disapproval of the marriage. In the same week that her father expressed his feelings, Stanley conveyed in a letter to Grimké that some of her friends had criticised their relationship: "I am

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[644] *Ibid.*
[645] *Ibid.*
[646] *Ibid.*
[647] *Ibid.*

tired and cross… my friends have been talking religion to me… I do wish that people would mind their own business and not trouble themselves about my soul's salvation."[648] Underlining her defiance, she continued that:

> "I said as sweetly as I could that I might be wrong but that I thought what I believed on such matters was something entirely between my own conscience and my maker. No one had a right to my views if I did not choose to give them and that I preferred as a general thing not to speak on the subject."[649]

Despite the candid warnings in April 1879 Archibald and Sarah married in Boston, and in the ensuing months, media outlets across the nation published details of their union.[650] Under the heading "Ethiopia and Caucasia," the *Washington Standard* explained that a "very extraordinary wedding lately took place" when "A.H. Grimké, a South Carolina negro whom the emancipation set free, was united in the bonds of wedlock to Miss Sarah E. Stanley, the daughter of an Episcopal clergyman of Wisconsin, and of un-mixed Caucasian blood."[651] The article continued that Grimké was "well known and trusted," and "said to possess fine literary attainments;" while "Mrs Grimké is spoken of as a cultured woman, and fit to adorn the best society." Commenting on Stanley's assumed stance on their interracial union, the article claims she "has at least substantiated her own belief in the equality of the Ethiopian and European human types, and, according to accounts, she has the sympathy, support and justification of the best ranks of Boston society."[652] Emphasising the exceptionality of a white woman marrying a 'colored' man, one Nebraska paper noted: "It is rare that we chronicle the intermarriage of the races represented by the contracting parties, and we do not remember the parallel of the above record, so far as the social circumstances attending are concerned."[653]

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[648] Sarah Stanley Grimké to Archibald Grimké, February 26, 1879. Archibald H. Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 39-3, Folder 76

[649] *Ibid.*

[650] Honey, *Aphrodite's Daughter*, p.73; Newspaper articles detailing the Grimké-Stanley wedding include: *Dodge City Times*, Kansas. June 21, 1879, p.3; *Alexandria Gazette*, April 30, 1879; *Washington Standard*, (Olympia, Washington Territory) June 20, 1879; *The Red Cloud Chief*, (Nebraska) June 19, 1879

[651] *Washington Standard*, (Olympia, Washington Territory) June 20, 1879

[652] *Ibid.*

[653] *The Red Cloud Chief*, (Nebraska) June 19, 1879

The Birth of 'Nana'

Less than a year later in February 1880, their daughter Angelina Weld Grimké, whom they lovingly referred to as 'Nana,' was born, and named after her father's paternal white aunt Angelina Grimké Weld. The harmony of their marriage, however, was short-lived as the couple separated only a few years later in 1882; and Stanley hastily moved with Angelina to Michigan to be with her family while Grimké remained in Boston. The early disapproval from Stanley's family and friends regarding their union is often cited by scholars as the reason behind their marital breakdown, and while it is easy to conclude that external pressure was the sole cause, it is also reductive. Carolyn Amonitti Stubbs attributes the break to Stanley's suspicion of her husband's frequent absences from home; whereas Grimké family biographer Mark Perry argues that Stanley was overwhelmed by the stress of being married to a black man, despite her family's eventual adjustment to their interracial marriage.[654] While each of these reasons may indeed have contributed to the relationship's rupture, Maureen Honey points to a series of letters between Grimké and Stanley's father, M.C. Stanley, in which the men agreed her poor health was to blame. Considering that her psychological wellbeing deteriorated in the years leading to her death, this explanation does seem relevant. Interestingly, within these letters, M.C. Stanley comforted his anguished son-in-law, even providing advice on how he might win back his daughter's love.[655] Further evidence that the initial indignation Stanley's family expressed upon learning of her relationship with Grimké had subsided, is evidenced in the way in which they embraced their biracial granddaughter with love and open arms.

Two years after their separation, in May 1884, Stanley expressed a desire to maintain sole custody of Angelina, but assured Grimké that he may visit Angelina as often as he chose. When Grimké wrote to say he intended to visit, Stanley made it clear to him that: "I should rather not see you; but I shall offer no objections to you calling to see Nana... She is your child and you can visit her whenever you choose… Neither shall I object, as she grows older, to her living with you a portion of the time, provided you can make suitable arrangements for her care."[656] In September of the same year, she wrote to Grimké's brother, Francis, claiming: "I do not intend to ever return to live with Archie," before adding that she would "be glad to

[654] Honey, *Aphrodite's Daughters*, p.74; and Mark Perry, *Lift Up Thy Voice: The Sarah and Angelina Grimké Family's Journey from Slaveholders to Civil Rights Leader,* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003) pp.256-257
[655] Honey, *Aphrodite's Daughters*, p.74
[656] Sarah Stanley Grimké to Archibald Grimké, May 18, 1884. Archibald H. Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 39-3, Folder 78

know explicitly Archie's wishes or intentions in regard to the child, since she is legally his."[657] Later that month, Stanley voiced concern regarding Grimké's legal claims to Angelina, and outright asked him to surrender them: "I wish to be assured that you fully relinquish your claim to her person, and freely entrust her care and education in my hands." She then not only asked Grimké to detail the financial provisions he would make towards Angelina's upbringing, but claimed: "I wish very much to be able to attend personally to her education and am sure that you can but acknowledge that no one can do for her more carefully or prayerfully than her mother."[658] A few days later Stanley wrote to Grimké again, this time highlighting the precarious position that mothers, who did not possess the same legal custodial rights to their children as fathers, faced during the late-nineteenth century: "You may rest-assured that in case of my death before yours, no one will dispute your claim to your child. I only wish to be equally certain that I am not liable to have her taken from me at any moment."[659] A few months later, after seemingly assessing the extent of her legal vulnerability, Stanley realised that while Grimké continued to financially support Angelina, he would always have a legal claim to her, and so she made the decision that Grimké should no longer provide an allowance.[660] Claiming that "it is not for the best good and happiness of our little girl to be brought up under divided claims," Stanley argued that Angelina "ought to be either wholly yours or wholly mine. I therefore wish to assume, at once, her entire support & education." She made clear however that in the case of her death, she wished that Angelina be "left free to choose between you & my people."[661]

Despite her earlier insistence that no person could provide for Angelina "more carefully or prayerfully than her mother," Stanley soon reversed her decision with abrupt finality. In April 1887 she wrote to Grimké claiming that she could no longer care for Angelina. Citing the disparate race between herself and her daughter as a major reason, she explained: "I now realize that it is for the best good and happiness of little Nana that she should go to you at once… She needs that love and sympathy of one of her own race which I

[657] Sarah Stanley Grimké to Francis Grimké, September 5, 1884. Archibald H. Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 39-3, Folder 78
[658] Sarah Stanley Grimké to Archibald Grimké, September 22, 1884. Archibald H. Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 39-3, Folder 78
[659] Sarah Stanley Grimké to Archibald Grimké, September 30, 1884. Archibald H. Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 39-3, Folder 78
[660] Sarah Stanley Grimké to Archibald Grimké, January 11, 1885. Archibald H. Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 39-3, Folder 78
[661] *Ibid.*

am sure her father still has for her, but which it is impossible for others to give."[662] Building on this, she suggested that her family's white race would impede Angelina's development:

> "My own family, kind and anxious as there are to do right, do not, neither is it possible for them to give her the love she requires to make her good and happy and a child cannot be good unless it is also happy. It is almost impossible for her to be happy with me, try as I will, because she is now getting old enough to see and feel the thoughts of others, which the difference in race and color naturally engender regarding her."[663]

Stanley's solution to sparing her child the psychological trauma of being raised among whites, was to put Angelina on an 'Express' train from either St Louis or Cleveland, and telegraph Grimké the moment the train left so there would be no confusion regarding their daughter's arrival.[664] Stanley put her young daughter on the train to Boston all by herself, a detail later raised in a letter to Angelina by her former teacher, Frances Morehead, who remarked: "I think you were a brave girl to take such a long trip alone. Did no one have the care of you all the way from Kansas to Boston?"[665] Upon hearing that Angelina had arrived with her father safely, Stanley commended the decision and claimed that Angelina "needs a wholly different mental and social atmosphere from that which my surroundings and work have forced upon her. Hard as it was to resign her, my mind is now perfectly at ease in regard to her present and future welfare, and this great relief will no doubt act beneficially."[666]

Irrespective of the hasty and heart-breaking abandonment of both their marriage and their daughter, Grimké did not resort to cruel retaliation. Over the years he encouraged Angelina to maintain a bond with her mother, reminding her in 1897, ten years after she had last seen her mother, that he did not object to Angelina writing to her but rather that he would be "very sorry if [she] failed to answer her letters," for he did "not wish you to forget that she is your mother or your duty to her as her child."[667] Immediately following their separation,

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[662] Sarah Stanley Grimké to Archibald Grimké, April 25, 1887. Archibald H. Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 39-3, Folder 79. Emphasis in original.
[663] *Ibid.*
[664] *Ibid.*
[665] Frances Morehead to Angelina Weld Grimké, June 26, 1887. Angelina Weld Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 39-3, Folder 79
[666] Sarah Stanley Grimké to Archibald Grimké, May 12, 1887. Archibald H. Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 39-3, Folder 79
[667] Archibald Grimké to Angelina Weld Grimké, September 7 1897. Angelina Weld Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 38-4, Folder 67

Stanley wrote many letters to Angelina, detailing items such as coloured crayons and 'Oat Meal Soap' which she promised to buy for her, as well as the many things she had seen on her travels. Stanley also urged Angelina to visit her sister, Angelina's maternal aunt, Emma Tolles in Hartford. In 1887 Stanley was elated that Angelina had enjoyed the Fourth of July at the Tolles's household: "It made me so, happy – Ever so very happy, to know you have found so many good friends, and Uncles and Aunts;" and explained that simply hearing of her fun "makes me feel, too, as though I were having a good time with you in Hartford."[668] Throughout many of her letters, it is clear that Stanley had to respond to Angelina's repeated questions about when they might see each other again. In one undated letter Stanley claimed that she did not "know now when I shall be able to come East and see you but it will be more than one year," before explaining "I want you to be just as happy and contented as you can be, all the time, and I am sure you will be, with your papa and teacher, and all your numerous other friends."[669] In another undated letter, Stanley attempted to placate Angelina's yearning to be reunited with her mother, by reminding her of the promise she made on the last day they were together:

> "I want to know if you remember the promise I made my little girl that day on the cars just as I left you when you were going to Boston? I wish you to always remember what I said to you then; for you know your Mamma never breaks her word, and some day you will need your Mamma, and then you will see her. But it may be a long time before you will need me."[670]

In her analysis of this mother-daughter correspondence, Maureen Honey argues that Stanley's letters reveal how painful the separation was for her, and that Stanley consequently attempted to forge a spiritual bond with her daughter which would transcend the physical distance between them.[671] It could, however, be argued that Stanley's interest in the esoteric furthered Angelina's grief and natural desire to be reunited with her mother. Indeed, in one letter Stanley claimed that: "One Saturday night I woke up hearing you call 'Mamma, Mamma'

[668] Sarah Stanley Grimké, to Angelina Weld Grimké, July 15, 1887. Angelina Weld Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 38-5, Folder 92. Emphasis in original.
[669] Sarah Stanley Grimké, to Angelina Weld Grimké, Undated. Angelina Weld Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 38-5, Folder 92
[670] Sarah Stanley Grimké, to Angelina Weld Grimké, Undated. Angelina Weld Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 38-5, Folder 92. Emphasis in original.
[671] Honey, *Aphrodite's Daughters*, p.77

just as plain as you could be. I expect you woke up suddenly and forgot where you were. – Do you remember?"[672] In another she claimed to often dream of Angelina:

> "The other night I thought I saw you out in a large cornfield. I called to you and you looked up and laughed as heartily as could be, and then you began to run up and down the rows of corn as fast as you could make your feet go. I thought your hair was long, and that every once in a while you would shake it over your shoulders… Do you ever dream of Mamma? Some time I shall be able to come to you in my Shadow Body and really see you. How would you like that? – And some time we will be together again."[673]

Although Stanley's letters conveyed a desire to be reunited with her daughter, albeit in the unspecified future and on a spiritual plane, she never physically nor clairvoyantly saw Angelina again after putting her on the 'Express' train at the age of seven. On August 25 1898, Sarah Stanley committed suicide.

It is unclear exactly when Angelina was informed of her mother's death, but it would appear that she was formally told by her aunt Emma Tolles in a letter dated October 1 1898.[674] The long timeframe between Stanley's suicide and Tolles's letter to Angelina may have been due to grief, out of awkwardness, or perhaps because of confusion over whether or not Angelina already knew. Indeed, Tolles does open the letter by stating: "I am very sorry to be the bearer of sad news though Mrs Stuart may have told you, for she has been informed of your dear mother's passing." Within the body of the letter, Tolles claimed that Stanley "was hoping to see you once more and was trying so hard to make a little home to which you could come and visit," before continuing that "she never ceased to love you as dearly as ever and it was a great trial to her to have you go away from her, how great God alone knows; but it was the only thing to do."[675] Providing vague details surrounding Stanley's death, Tolles only mentioned that she had received "several letters from the people who took care of her. She had every thing done that could be done… but finally grew so weak she could not hold a

[672] Sarah Stanley Grimké to Angelina Weld Grimké, Undated. Angelina Weld Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 38-5, Folder 92
[673] Sarah Stanley Grimké to Angelina Weld Grimké, Undated. Angelina Weld Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 38-5, Folder 92. Emphasis in original.
[674] Emma Tolles to Angelina Weld Grimké, October 1 1898. Angelina Weld Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 38-2, Folder 19
[675] *Ibid.*

pencil."[676] The circumstances surrounding Stanley's sudden suicide are detailed in letters between her father and ex-husband, Grimké. M.C. Stanley wrote to Grimké in November 1898, to explain that Stanley had travelled to San Diego "to die of poison."[677] Then on February 18 1899, he informed Grimké that Stanley's ashes were scattered into the San Diego Bay from a boat at dusk. At the end of this letter, M.C. Stanley told Grimké that Stanley's last letter said: "O, if I only had Nana with me, how much happier I should be."[678]

While Stanley's deteriorating psychological wellbeing throughout the 1880s and 1890s go some way to account for the troubled relationship she shared with her daughter, it is important to consider Caroline Streeter's argument that age formed a crucial factor in the perception towards biracial women.[679] Angelina was seven years old when Stanley decided to return her to Grimké and relinquish all responsibility of her. Although Angelina had not yet reached sexual maturity, her biracial heritage up to this point had been framed by her childhood innocence and her ability to potentially defuse the familial disapproval directed at her parents' interracial marriage. It is when Angelina reaches the age of seven, however, that Stanley suggests that Angelina's race became more perceptible to others as well as Angelina herself.[680] Despite Angelina's young age she was forced, by maternal abandonment, to seek the "love and sympathy" of "her own race."[681] It is here, as Angelina's biracial identity seemingly started to manifest, that the course of her life changed forever and the complexities which affected those with biracial heritage becomes evident.

Angelina's Relationship with Motherhood

Despite never becoming a mother herself, much of Angelina Grimké's work focuses on the theme of motherhood. Several scholars have therefore made links between the maternal estrangement Grimké experienced during her childhood, and the literature she produced. Gloria Hull points out that "it is psychologically interesting that in her literary works, motherhood is a major theme, and all of her girls have loving mothers or mother

[676] Emma Tolles to Angelina Weld Grimké, October 1 1898. Angelina Weld Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 38-2, Folder 19
[677] M.C. Stanley to Archibald Grimké, November 16 1898. Archibald H. Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 39-3, Folder 74
[678] M.C. Stanley to Archibald Grimké, February 18 1899. Archibald H. Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 39-3, Folder 74
[679] Streeter, *Tragic No More,* pp.106-107
[680] Sarah Stanley Grimké to Archibald Grimké, April 25, 1887. Archibald H. Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 39-3, Folder 79. Emphasis in original.
[681] *Ibid.*

surrogates."[682] Moreover, she generally fashioned the female protagonists in her fiction to be petite and dark-haired, like herself.[683] Maureen Honey contends that "given how consistently Grimké returned to the subject of motherhood in her plays and short stories, scholars have concluded that her mother's absence had a profound impact… and that the rupture was painfully deep."[684] Citing Patricia Young's prevailing view that Grimké never forgave her mother for abandoning her, and therefore created loving mother figures in her prose to compensate, Honey outlines that Grimké's fiction often reflected resentment regarding her mother's rejection.[685] Some of Grimké's poems do point to the bitterness she felt towards her mother, and while Honey suggests the following poem implies a special closeness between mother and child, it could also be argued that it exposes a veiled critique of abrupt and bewildering abandonment:

What can I give
My happy dark-haired mother
Once I gave her a white flower
The first of the spring,
Her eyes were shining as she kissed me.
Now I give her a song
Her eyes are puzzled
As she looks at me.
She does not kiss me now.[686]

Grimké also used poetry to depict the scene in which her mother's ashes were scattered in the San Diego Bay at dusk. Her poem 'Longing,' was written in Grimké's poetry notebook on July 18, 1899, and then later published in the *Boston Transcript* in 1901:

As a white dove, against the deep blue sky,
Skims swiftly far away on restless wings,
As a blithe barque shakes off the clinging spray,

[682] Hull, *Color, Sex, and Poetry*, p.109
[683] Gloria T. Hull, '"Lines She Did Not Dare:" Angelina Weld , Harlem Renaissance Poet,' in Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin's (eds.) *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader,* (New York: Routledge, 1993) p.462
[684] Honey, *Aphrodite's Daughters*, p.77
[685] *Ibid.* pp.77-78
[686] *Ibid.* p.78

And to the gallant breeze her ensign flings,
So longs my soul to fly away to thee.

As lights the panting dove in some far land,
And at the sunset hour sleeps on her nest,
And as the barque tossed by the blustering gale,
At last in port lies on the Ocean's breast,
So longs my soul to rest alway[s] with thee.[687]

In addition to the separation from her mother in 1887, and her suicide in 1898, the departure of Grimké's father for the Dominican Republic for four years from late 1894 to 1898 created a third dislocation in Grimké's life, often overlooked by scholars.[688] Indeed, although Archibald took sole custody of Grimké in 1887, he soon became a consul to the Dominican Republic leaving Grimké in the care of her Uncle Francis and his wife Charlotte in Washington D.C. One of the few scholars to address the impact of this posting on Grimké's creative work is Brian Russell Roberts.[689] More specifically, Roberts draws a connection between the absent lynched father in her 1916 play, *Rachel*, and Grimké's distress over her separation from her own father in 1894.[690] Further evidence lies in the detail that the dramatic action in *Rachel* takes place on October 16, and then leaps ahead to the same date four years later; while Archibald took Grimké to live with her Uncle on October 14, 1894, and did not return for four years.[691]

While the sense of parental abandonment throughout Grimké's work is important, another related aspect of *Rachel* is the depiction of black motherhood. As the first non-musical lynching play to be performed by black actors and produced for an interracial audience, *Rachel* is considered a seminal text in the African-American anti-lynching tradition.[692] Explaining in 1920 that *Rachel* was intentionally written to appeal to white

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[687] Poem extract taken from: Honey, *Aphrodite's Daughters*, p.80
[688] *Ibid.*
[689] Brian Russell Roberts, *Artistic Ambassadors: Literary and International Representation of the New Negro Era*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013) pp.92-115
[690] *Ibid.*pp.93-94
[691] *Ibid.* pp.94-96
[692] Mitchell, *Living with Lynching,* p.10; and Julie Buckner Armstrong, '"The People… Took Exception to her Remarks:" Meta Warrick Fuller, Angelina Weld Grimké, and the Lynching of Mary Turner,' *Mississippi Quarterly,* Vol. 61, No.1-2, (2008) p.136. Although early drafts were completed in 1914, long before the 1915 release of D.W. Griffith's controversial film *Birth of a Nation*, *Rachel* is widely considered to have been a creative response to Griffith's portrayal of racialised violence. For more information, please see: Robin Bernstein, 'Never Born:' Angela Weld Grimké's *Rachel* as Ironic Response to Topsy,' *The Journal of American Drama and Theatre*, Vol 19, No 2, (2007) p.65

women, Grimké posited that: "If then, white women of this country could see, feel, understand just what effect their prejudice and the prejudice of their fathers, brothers, husbands, sons were having on the souls of coloured mothers everywhere, and upon the mothers that are to be, a great power to affect public opinion would be set free and the battle would be half won."[693] While Grimké's appeal called for white women to recognise the complacent role they played in supporting white male supremacy, her technique received a considerable amount of criticism from black contemporaries. Specifically, the title character in *Rachel* originally longed to be a mother, but by the final Act vowed never to have children after learning, not only that her father and brother had been lynched more than a decade ago, but that racial discrimination continued to effect innocent young children.[694] While intended to encourage white women to join the anti-lynching movement, some members of the African-American community interpreted the idea of forgoing marriage and children as advocating racial suicide.[695] Grimké responded to this criticism stating: "Since it has been understood that 'Rachel' preaches race suicide, I would emphasise that that was not my intention. To the contrary, the appeal is not primarily to the coloured people, but to the whites."[696] Despite this, critical views were reinforced each time Grimké adopted this literary approach, particularly in 1919 after the publication of 'The Closing Door,' which saw the protagonist smother her new-born baby after hearing about the lynching of her brother.[697]

In her analysis of *Rachel*, literary scholar Judith Stephens argues that Grimké used the period's notion of idealised motherhood to demonstrate how black mothers were excluded from that ideology: "If motherhood was the ultimate and most sacred achievement for women whose 'instinctive' nurturing tendencies were especially suited for the task, how did this apply to black mothers who lived in fear of their children's deaths at the hands of a brutal lynch mob?"[698] Moreover, Stephens points out that Grimké's technique was to present this ideology and "question the desirability of motherhood from a black woman's perspective at a time when lynching was at an all-time high."[699] Through her writing, Grimké tapped into a long history of black maternal mourning, not only challenging the notion that black mothers were incapable of maternal affection, but also critiquing a society which enabled the

[693] Judith L. Stephens, 'Anti-Lynch Plays by African American Women: Race, Gender, and Social Protest in American Drama,' *African American Review*, Vol. 26, No. 2, (1992) p.333
[694] Grimké, *Rachel*, pp.93-95
[695] Armstrong, '"The People…Took Exception to her Remarks," pp.125-126
[696] Bernstein, 'Never Born:' Angela Weld Grimké's *Rachel* as Ironic Response to Topsy,' p.66
[697] Armstrong, '"The People…Took Exception to her Remarks," pp.125-126
[698] Stephens, 'Anti-Lynch Plays by African American Women,' p.333
[699] *Ibid.* pp.333-334

perpetual abuse of black bodies. Grimké was not alone in her attempt to creatively explore the theme of black motherhood. This rhetoric could be seen in the work of Sojourner Truth, who chronicled the forced detachment of African-American mothers from their children, while Grimké's Washington DC contemporaries, such as Georgia Douglas Johnson, produced poems and plays which depicted the distinct plight of black mothers living with the threat of lynching.[700] Johnson's poem 'Courage,' for instance, spoke to the bravery of black mothers raising children of colour within a nation that condemned them to a life of "scorn" and "exile" because of their racial heritage:

Braver than lions I must be

To give to child of mine

This heritage of certain scorn

A place among the swine

And bind him over to the sod

A tethered exile, sorrow-shod.[701]

Although many writers addressed the anxieties which plagued black mothers raising black and brown children, Grimké's personal experience of maternal abandonment is particularly significant. The responsibility of raising a non-white child within the racialised tensions of the late-nineteenth century would undoubtedly have weighed heavy on the hearts of all mothers to children at risk of racial prejudice, regardless of the mother's own racial identity. It could therefore be argued that Grimké's experience of maternal abandonment at the early age of seven, meant she was forced to consider the unique fears that raising a black or brown child would have engendered, fears her own mother touched on when she relinquished responsibility of her. The extent to which she was troubled by the absence of her mother is clear in her diary. In July 1903, she mused: "oh how I wish that I had a mother! One to whom I might go and lay my head upon her [breast] and weep away if possible all the [bitterness]."[702] However by September, she claimed that "I only once in a while have a

[700] Please see Chapter Two for analysis of Georgia Douglas Johnson's plays *Blue Blood* (1926) and *Blue Eyed Black Boy* (1930). Sojourner Truth, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave, Emancipated from Bodily Servitude by the State of New York, in 1828*, (Boston: The Author, 1850) p.15, p.37, and p.44.
[701] Georgia Douglas Johnson, 'Courage.' Georgia Douglas Johnson Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 162-4 Folder 13
[702] Angelina Weld Grimké, Private Diary, July 18, 1903. Angelina Weld Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 38-15, Folder 248

[grieving longing] [for a mother]… but I suppose I am used to not having one."[703] This shift in perception provides some insight into the very strong personal sentiments Grimké expressed about domesticity and motherhood, particularly in her early twenties when she renounced childbearing, marriage, and love entirely.[704] It is impossible to not draw links between Angelina and her protagonist Rachel. Grimké's own words: "I shall never know what it means to be a mother, for I shall never marry. I am through with love and the like forever;" mirror Rachel's vow that "no child of mine shall ever lie upon my breast, for I will not have it rise up, in the terrible days that are to be – and call me cursed."[705] Literary critic Anne Mai Yee Jansen contends that Grimké does not portray Rachel as hopeless or defeated by racism, but instead "provides the reader with a sympathetic and intelligent protagonist whose intentional desire to forgo motherhood empowers her and gives her greater agency."[706] Building on Jansen's contention, it can be argued that by tapping into the anti-lynching literary tradition and creating an empowered character who actively renounced motherhood, Grimké sought to justify her own decision through a character whose story was more relatable to a wider audience than her own experience as the estranged daughter of a white mother.

By honing in on the life and experience of Angelina Weld Grimké, the first half of this chapter has provided an insight into the challenges faced by an interracial couple and their biracial child in the Northeast of the United States during the late nineteenth century. Through the examination of family correspondence, diary entries, and creative publications, this chapter has charted the journey of initial familial disapproval to acceptance, and from colour-blind love to maternal abandonment. It has revealed the ways in which age formed a significant catalyst to the major changes in Grimké's life. Building on Caroline Streeter's argument that age is a crucial factor in the perception of biracial women, it was shown that at the young age of seven, Grimké's race was deemed more perceptible by her white mother, and therefore a reason for her to no longer be raised by her.[707] Grimké's experience as the mixed-race daughter of a white mother who could not carry the 'burden' of raising a non-

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[703] Angelina Weld Grimké, Private Diary, September 6, 1903. Angelina Weld Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 38-15, Folder 248
[704] Armstrong, '"The People… Took Exception to her Remarks," p.125
[705] Angelina Weld Grimké, Private Diary, September 6, 1903. Angelina Weld Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 38-15, Folder 248; and Grimké, *Rachel*, p.63
[706] Anne Mai Yee Jansen, 'Under Lynching's Shadow: Grimké's Call for Domestic Reconfiguration in *Rachel*,' *African American Review*, Vol. 47, No.2-3, (2014) p.395
[707] Sarah Stanley Grimké to Archibald Grimké, April 25, 1887. Archibald H. Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 39-3, Folder 79; and Streeter, *Tragic No More,* pp.106-107

white child, lead Grimké to question the agonising realities of raising a child of colour within the violently racialised United States.

The second part of this chapter will explore the life of Philippa Schuyler. Born over fifty years after Grimké, Schuyler was similarly born to a white mother and a black father within the institution of marriage. However, it will be shown that despite this similar familial makeup, they negotiated their biracial identity in differing ways. While Grimké chose to identify as an African-American woman and fully engaged herself with the African-American intelligentsia in Washington DC, Schuyler instead crafted a new identity, detached from her biracial heritage: Felipa Monterro y Schuyler.

"A Ray of Light in the Darkening Storm of Racial Trouble:"[708] A Case Study of Philippa Schuyler

Born on August 2 1931 to the African-American journalist George Schuyler and white-Texan artist Josephine Cogdell, Philippa Duke Schuyler was heralded as an exceptional example of the positive results mixed-racial parentage could achieve. A child genius and piano prodigy who could read and write by the age of two, Philippa's talents were attributed to her mixed-race 'hybrid vigour' alongside Josephine's eccentric child-rearing techniques, which included a diet of raw food.[709] Placed in the public eye by her parents at a very young age, Philippa came to be known as the "Shirley Temple of the Negroes."[710] When she was just eight years old, she was selected by the Women's Service League of Brooklyn as one of thirteen 'coloured' women to be recognised at the World's Fair for distinguished service to their race and sex, before officials at the 1940 World's Fair named June 19 'Philippa Schuyler Day.' Upheld throughout the 1930s and 1940s as a shining example of the 'best of both races,' Philippa eventually rejected her biracial identity, and distanced herself from any suggestion that she was the daughter of an 'American Negro.' In 1967 while working as a war correspondent in Vietnam, Philippa was involved in a helicopter mission to evacuate Vietnamese orphans. When the helicopter experienced difficulty, however, and crashed into the sea, Philippa drowned. Although at face-value Philippa's life seemingly fits the 'tragic mulatta' convention, this case study will not to adhere to 'tragic hybrid' rhetoric, but rather

[708] Quote taken from a two-page article detailing Philippa Schuyler's career, dated for release the week of November 6, 1966. Schuyler Family Collection - Philippa Duke Schuyler Series, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, MG 63, Box 21 Folder 1
[709] Talalay, *Composition in Black and White,* pp.12-14; Just one example of Philippa being labelled a child prodigy by the press can be found here: *New York Times*, 20 June 1940, p.28
[710] Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies,* p.358; and McNeil, *Sex and Race in the Black Atlantic,* p.38

expose the various and very real ways in which American race relations provided a distinct experience for women of biracial heritage. It will not argue that biracial women 'had it worse' than visibly non-mixed African-American women, but instead argue that the distinct experiences of biracial women born to white mothers need to be told. Indeed, Philippa's life as a biracial woman in the United States draws upon issues of hereditary, psychological stability and 'tragic mulatta' typecasting, and therefore provides an important insight into how cultural and intellectual rhetoric influenced the lived experience of biracial women. Her experience reveals the way in which the lives of mixed-race women have too easily been cast as conflicted or 'tragic,' and provides an important link to the wider implications of this thesis, and considerations of how the lived realities of race, gender, class, and skin tone intersected and shaped the lives of African-American and mixed-race women. Born fifty-one years after Angelina Weld Grimké, Philippa's life therefore forms an interesting parallel to Grimké's, and her story supplements understandings of the lived reality of being raised by a white woman as a person of colour during the early twentieth century.

"America's Last Frontier:"[711] The Marriage of George and Josephine Schuyler

Before examining Philippa's life, it is first necessary to analyse the experiences and ideologies of her parents, in order to put her formative years into contextual perspective. The couple met in July 1927 when Josephine, who had contributed poetry and prose to the *Messenger* for four years, visited the publication's office to meet its editor, George Schuyler.[712] The two began an intimate courtship which eventually led to their marriage five months later on January 6, 1928. Both George and Josephine had interesting childhoods, which are significant when considered alongside their own approach to rearing a biracial child. The details surrounding George Schuyler's birth remain ambiguous. In his 1966 autobiography, *Black and Conservative*, he claims to have been born on February 25 1895 in Providence, Rhode Island; yet according to historian Oscar Williams, Rhode Island does not have a record of his birth. Williams notes that the absence of a birth certificate is not in itself significant, but rather when his family's circumstance around this time is further investigated, details do not add up.[713] The 1900 Syracuse census reports his mother Eliza, as a childless widow, while George is listed as his grandmother's "adopted grandson," born in New York. Conversely the 1910 census, which lists George's stepfather as the head of the household,

[711] Josephine Schuyler, 'An Interracial Marriage,' *The American Mercury*, (March, 1946) p.277
[712] Talalay, *Composition in Black and White,* p.17
[713] Oscar Renal Williams, *George S. Schuyler: Portrait of a Black Conservative*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2007) pp.3-4

records George as a “mulatto” stepson with Massachusetts as his place of birth.[714] Williams posits that an explanation for such perplexing origins may be that George was born out of wedlock, and that the family tried to protect itself from shame, or that George was indeed adopted which would explain why his parents were listed as “mulatto” while he was dark-skinned. Regardless of the true circumstance of his birth, Williams argues that this ambiguity could go some way to explain George’s reluctance to identify with African-Americans, as he harboured his own frustration of figuring out who he truly was and where he belonged.[715] While perhaps a slight stretch, it is nonetheless significant that George’s early racial classification was somewhat fluid despite his dark skin and outward appearance. It could be argued that this fluidity was the start of his rejection of the rigidity of racial difference. Moreover, it could also be suggested that George’s formative experience of racial classification foreshadowed the identity conflict Philippa later exhibited. After moving to New York City during the early 1920s, George became involved with the black socialist group Friends of Negro Freedom. This connection secured him a job as a writer and then eventually editor for A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen's magazine, *The Messenger*, and began his career in journalism. By 1924, George also authored a weekly column in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and contributed ten articles to the *American Mercury* while social satirist and cultural critic H.L. Mencken was editor.

In 1931, George published the satirical novel *Black No More*, which imagined a version of the United States in which all African-Americans had been transformed into white-Caucasians.[716] Critiquing America’s racialised social stratification, Schuyler’s satirical commentary condemned the myths of racial purity espoused by white supremacists, and addressed a number of themes including labour unionism, black leadership, assimilation, and the performativity of race. While it can be agreed that *Black No More* is “an obvious parody” of the racial passing narrative within much African-American literature of the period, Schuyler’s focus on the widespread fear of white women giving birth to ‘brown babies’ is especially noteworthy when it is considered that this novel was published in the very same year that Schuyler’s white wife Josephine gave birth to the biracial, brown-skinned

[714] *Ibid.*
[715] *Ibid.* p.4
[716] George S. Schuyler, *Black No More: Being an Account of the Strange and Wonderful Workings of Science in the Land of the Free, A.D. 1933 - 1940*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1931;1989)

Philippa.[717] Indeed, historian Caroline Streeter has argued that “the signposts of birth and death delimiting Philippa Schuyler’s short life seem predestined to make her an archetypal figure of the racial boundary.”[718] While identifying that Philippa’s death in 1967 occurred just weeks before the *Loving vs. Virginia* case banned all laws against interracial marriage, Streeter does not recognise the significance of Philippa’s birth year: the year that her father published a popular novel saturated with references to America’s anxiety surrounding biracial babies. As explored in the Introductory Chapter, such anxieties sometimes manifested in the form of ‘black baby’ fables, which told the tale of white women giving birth to black babies, and intended to alert white women to the supposed dangers of interracial relations with men that possessed even an “invisible drop of Negro blood,” by invoking the notion of a “reversion to type.”[719]

To briefly summarise Schuyler’s satirical novel, a respected black physician named Dr. Junius Crookman, has invented a process which, by “electrical nutrition and glandular control,” enables the skin colour, hair texture and facial features of black people to adhere to that of Caucasians.[720] In other words, for the meagre sum of $50 black Americans could turn into white Americans and, as a result, attain all the privileges that such a condition possessed. The treatment, however, was not hereditary, meaning that all children born to treated patients will appear African-American or biracial. Through his business ‘Black-No-More Incorporated’ Crookman reasoned that “if there were no Negroes, there could be no Negro problem. Without a Negro problem, Americans could concentrate their attention on something constructive.”[721] The novel’s main plot follows Crookman’s first patient Max Disher who, after being rejected by a beautiful white woman in a ‘Honky Tonk Club,’ resolves that “as a white man he could go anywhere, be anything he wanted to be, do most anything he wanted to do, be a free man at last.”[722] After receiving the treatment and now possessing the “open-sesame of a pork-colored skin,” Max changed his name to Matthew Fisher and moved to Atlanta in search of the white woman who had disparagingly told him “I never dance with niggers.”[723] Realising that money could be made by scamming white

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[717] Hee-Jung Serenity Joo argues that *Black No More* is “an obvious parody” of the racial passing narrative. Hee-Jung Serenity Joo, ‘Miscegenation, Assimilation, and Consumption: Racial Passing in George Schuyler's “Black No More” and Eric Liu's “The Accidental Asian,”’ *MELUS*, Vol.33, No.3 (2008) p.172
[718] Streeter, *Tragic No More*, p.104
[719] Thomas Dixon Jr, *The Leopard’s Spots: A Romance of the White Man’s Burden, 1865-1900* (New York, Doubleday Page & Co. 1903) p.394. Accessed via: https://archive.org/details/cu31924031174620
[720] Schuyler, *Black No More*, p.27
[721] *Ibid.* p.54
[722] *Ibid.* p.26
[723] *Ibid.* p.35 and p.23

supremacists in Atlanta, Fisher pretends to be an anthropologist from the New York Anthropological Society, and convinces the Imperial Grand Wizard of the Knights of Nordica, Rev. Henry Givens, to employ him. Through a twist of fate, the white woman Fisher has been looking for is Givens' daughter Helen and he marries her. Although happy in his marriage to his beautiful but 'ignorant' wife, who is "a worse nigger-hater than her father," Fisher is plagued by an underlying fear that she will one day give birth to a 'brown baby.'[724]

As a direct result of Black-No-More's pervasive success, Fisher's personal wealth grew and membership to the Knights of Nordica increases. Deeming $50 a small cost to leave behind segregation and discrimination, the majority of African-Americans undergo the Black-No-More treatment and infiltrate white society to finally achieve the civil liberties of full American citizenship.[725] As Jim Crow railway carriages, waiting rooms and facilities are no longer necessary, as former Black Belt housing need to be rebuilt to suit white tenants, and as thousands of individuals get paid the wage of a white person rather than a reduced salary because of their 'Negro ancestry,' the economy of the United States suffers and taxes rise. Moreover, instead of eliminating the "Negro problem," Black-No-More drives the nation into a new state of racial paranoia by making it impossible to distinguish 'real' whites from former African-Americans. By appropriating this information, and linking "the Pope, the Yellow Peril, the Alien Invasion and Foreign Entanglements with Black-No-More as devices of the Devil," Fisher greatly increases the membership and influence of Imperial Grand Wizard Givens and the Knights of Nordica.[726] During a campaign to elect Givens' as President, the Democratic Party conducts a genealogy project which they hope will discredit the Republican candidates. The results, however, reveal that almost everyone in the United States has a black relative. These findings are stolen and published before the Democrats can erase them. While Fisher's true identity is safe, the Givens' family are revealed to have a mulatto ancestor just as Helen gives birth to a brown baby boy. As the Givens' family takes blame for the baby's complexion, Fisher comes clean and tells everyone his history. Despite Helen's earlier prejudice, she now has a change of heart:

> "There was no feeling of revulsion at the thought that her husband was a Negro. There once would have been but that was seemingly

[724] Schuyler, *Black No More*, p.138
[725] The majority of African-Americans underwent this treatment, with the exception of some individuals who preferred to remain black, and those within institutions such as prisons, orphanages, insane asylums and homes for the elderly. Schuyler, *Black No More*, pp.131-132
[726] Schuyler, *Black No More*, p.106

> centuries ago when she had been unaware of her remoter Negro ancestry. She felt proud of her Matthew… They had money and a beautiful, brown baby… Compared to what she possessed… all talk of race and color was damned foolishness."[727]

As Fisher gets a 'happily ever after' of sorts, the rest of American society descends into a strange paradox after it is discovered that the skin pigmentation of African-Americans who have undergone 'Black-No-More' treatment is lighter than the existing white population. As paleness comes to imply evidence of "Negro blood," racial boundaries are redrawn as prejudices emerge against those with pale skin, charges of mental inferiority among pale citizens leads to segregation, and a trend develops among the upper-classes to heavily bronze and tan their skin.[728] The novel ends with the suggestion of a multiracially harmonious society, as Dr Crookman surveys a photograph in a newspaper showing Matthew Fisher with his wife and the Givens family alongside his former-black colleagues, all of them "as dusky" as the biracial Fisher baby. According to Adenike Marie Davidson, this conclusion underlines Schuyler's main message that "there are advantages to possessing white skin in a society that worships this, but human nature does not change purely because of skin color."[729]

A great deal of literature has been dedicated to the various themes that Schuyler explored throughout the novel but, as noted earlier, of particular significance is his treatment of the miscegenation subject. As a black man married to a white woman and expecting a biracial child, allusions within the text to the hypocritical reality that American society condemns and chastises anyone involved in such a pairing, are fraught. Indeed throughout the novel, the primary concern and rallying cry of all those opposed to 'Black-No-More' is the threat to white womanhood at the hands of newly-concealed 'Negroes.' For instance, one newspaper, the Tallahassee *Announcer*, claimed that:

> "Day by day we see the color line which we have so laboriously established being rabidly destroyed. There would not be so much cause for alarm in this, were it not for the fact that this vitiligo is not hereditary. In other words, THE OFFSPRING OF THESE WHITENED NEGROES WILL BE NEGROES! This means that

[727] Schuyler, *Black No More*, p.193
[728] *Ibid.* p.221
[729] Adenike Marie Davidson, 'Black No More,' *The Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, edited by William L. Andrews, Frances Smith Foster, and Trudier Harris, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2001) p.36

> your daughter, having married a supposed white man, may find herself with a black baby!"[730]

The entire nation became alarmed when another newspaper reported that "Wealthy White Girl has Negro Baby," and "hundreds of thousands of people, North and South, flocked into the Knights of Nordica."[731] As more reports of white women giving birth to black babies filled the daily newspapers, blame for the "tar-brushed offspring" always rested on the shoulders of the father, despite the fact that in some cases the white women themselves had recently become white.[732] That the focus of alarmed citizens lay on the perceived violation of white womanhood, exposes Schuyler's critique of a society which could tolerate and ignore the existence of biracial babies born to black women but was outraged at any indication of intimacy between a white woman and a black man. This is particularly evident at the start of the novel when Max imagines a perfect life with the white woman he met in the club. However his romantic dream soon slips into a nightmare, as the violent consequences that an interracial relationship between a black man and a white woman could engender permeates his subconscious:

> "Dreaming of dancing with her, dining with her, motoring with her, sitting beside her on a golden throne while millions of manacled white slaves prostrated themselves before him. Then there was a nightmare of grim, gray men with shotguns, baying hounds, a heap of gasoline-soaked faggots and a screeching, fanatical mob."[733]

Here, Schuyler underscores the ways in which the threat of lynching pervades the thoughts of African-Americans, even while asleep. After sarcastically remarking at one point that white men were now "deprived of the pleasure of black mistresses," the historic molestation of black women at the hands of white men is explicitly addressed through the genealogical report which found that many white American ancestors "associated with slaves, in many cases worked and slept with them. They intermixed with the blacks and the women were sexually exploited by their masters."[734] While addressing the distinct and hypocritical attitudes towards interracial relationships between black men and white women given the sustained exploitation of black women's bodies, the spectre of the 'brown baby' born to a

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[730] Schuyler, *Black No More*, p.50
[731] *Ibid.* p.117
[732] *Ibid.*
[733] *Ibid.* p.24
[734] Schuyler, *Black No More*, p.178

white woman is the plot's foremost concern. Recognising the treatment's shortfall, Black-No-More established 'lying-in hospitals' where expectant mothers could give birth and, should their baby be born with brown skin, the infant would immediately undergo "the 24-hour treatment that permanently turned black infants white."[735] Not all infants were turned white however, as the narrator notes that in the North, "the only Negroes to be seen were mulatto babies whose mothers, charmed by the beautiful color of their offspring, had defied convention and not turned them white."[736] This early recognition of the "beautiful color" of the biracial babies, foreshadows one of the novel's closing remarks that the new "America was definitely, enthusiastically, mulatto minded." It was noted earlier that *Black No More* was published in the year of Philippa's birth and indeed it is worth restating that George's work, even works of fiction like *Black No More* which devised a dystopian society that privileged brown 'mulatto' skin, would inevitably have had a formative influence in shaping Philippa's racial identity and the way in which George raised her.

Moving away from his fiction, through the 1920s to the 1940s George's stance on socialism shifted towards conservatism, and his writing gained him a reputation within the federal government as a radical, to the extent that the FBI conducted an investigation into his journalistic activities.[737] A report compiled by the War Department's Military Intelligence Division, dated February 16 1942, summarised that George is "said to be the most radical and widely read negro writer in the country. He has carried on a constant attack on the Army and Navy policies relative to Negroes and has been a contributing to the present low morale of same." The second page more clearly elucidated that:

> What is the most dangerous thing about subject's writing is that so many people believe it to be factual. Subject is the most widely read Negro newspaperman in the country and his articles influence the thinking of many Negro leaders… It is the opinion of this agent that subject is the most dangerous Negro in the country today and that if he is permitted to continue his attacks on the present war

[735] *Ibid.* p.119
[736] *Ibid.* p.132
[737] In 2006, under the Freedom of Information Act, Professor William Maxwell filed a request to obtain FBI files pertaining to an investigation on George Schuyler. Williams, *George S. Schuyler,* p.xii and p.166; and FBI Files on George Schuyler. https://archive.org/details/GeorgeS.SchuylerFBIFile

efforts he may agitate a rebellion among Negro soldiers stationed in the South.[738]

While there is little scope within the parameters of this thesis to explore the ways in which these files reveal a fascinating insight into reactions to George's perceived radicalism, they nonetheless highlight how George's interracial marriage and stance on racial equality were perceived by government informants and operatives. For instance, one agent wrote in September 1942 that an anonymous 'Informant' had advised that George was "as black as the Ace of Spades and some more," who married a poor white girl from the backwoods of the South, before stating that "colored women condemn Schuyler… because they feel he should have married one of his own race and consider his marriage to a white woman an insult to the negroes." As a side note, it is interesting that this 'Informant' incorrectly claimed Josephine was poor and from the 'backwoods,' as it emphasises the ways in which interracial relations involving white women were understood to have occurred amongst the lower orders of society. That George was married to this white woman was deemed the reason for him "constantly advocating racial mixture."[739] The report then detailed a Bureau letter, dated May 22 1942, concerned with a lecture conducted by Schuyler in Ohio. According to an 'Informant,' George "pooh-poohs all ideas of race and claims that there is not only white blood in all negroes but also goes further and claims that all whites have some negro blood."[740] The rest of the 'Informant's report in this paragraph have been retracted, but considering that George's statement about racial mixture being more pervasive than Americans would like to admit appeared several times throughout the FBI records, it would seem this rhetoric caused concern for investigators.

Josephine's account of her own childhood as the youngest of seven children in a wealthy Texan family, is also significant as it reveals that even when intending to endorse interracial marriage, her rhetoric was not always free from racist sentiment. Explaining that the physical contrasts in her and George's skin-hue gave an added "fillip" to their relationship, Josephine maintained in 1946 that this was due to the fact that she had been "pleasantly associated with Negroes all [her] life."[741] Detailing her upbringing as the daughter

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[738] War Department's Military Intelligence Division Report, dated February 16 1942. FBI Files on George Schuyler https://archive.org/details/GeorgeS.SchuylerFBIFile
[739] FBI Files on George Schuyler NY File No: 100-24049, dated September 22 1942, p.8 https://archive.org/details/GeorgeS.SchuylerFBIFile
[740] FBI Files on George Schuyler NY File No: 100-24049, dated September 22 1942, pp.8-9 https://archive.org/details/GeorgeS.SchuylerFBIFile
[741] Josephine Schuyler, 'An Interracial Marriage,' *The American Mercury*, (March, 1946) p.274

of a Texan cattleman, she went on to say she “had ridden after cattle with the colored cowboys, gone hunting and fishing with them… and on rainy evenings played blackjack or poker with them on the back porch or in the big fragrant kitchens of one of our several homes.”[742] Suggesting a voyeuristic nature to this relationship, Josephine continued that:

> As a child, the activities of the Negroes fascinated me. They were always doing something interesting – branding and dipping cattle, slaughtering hogs and sheep, shooting wild game or chasing coyotes out of the pastures, gathering pecans from the towering trees along the creeks. Good-naturedly, they let us white children follow them as they went about their work. On social occasions they provided music for dancing and entertained our guests with cakewalks and songs. In short, they played an active and important part in our lives.[743]

While Josephine’s intentions were to highlight that she had always had non-racist interactions with African-Americans, her anecdote reveals a naivety surrounding the power relations at play on her family’s ranch. That she claimed the black workers “good-naturedly” allowed the white children to watch them work, not only suggests an element of agency which would not have been afforded to African-Americans, but also Josephine’s patronising ignorance to this reality. Moreover, her reflection that the workers provided music on social occasions and “entertained *our* guests” further elucidates the racialised ‘us’ ‘them’ power-relations at work which Josephine fails to recognise or acknowledge.

Josephine’s ignorance of such racial power dynamics, can be traced to the start of her relationship with George, and are evidenced in her reflections of their early encounters. Throughout their relationship, she had a tendency to refer to his physical form, for instance claiming that “his black skin gleamed like satinwood” and that “his body is like polished bronze,” without considering the implications that this had in stirring stereotypes about black sexual physiognomy.[744] Speaking of the influence George had over her emotional mood, Josephine claimed that his physical presence, or more specifically his “African profile, brooding and proud” could have a profound effect on her. She claimed “it draws me in, undoes me, makes me long to sacrifice for it… I want to say ‘Devour me Negro, devour me.’” She then continued that George “takes my white throat in his hands… and a sensuous

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[742] *Ibid.*
[743] *Ibid.*
[744] Talalay, *Composition in Black and White,* p.17 and p.27

look of cruelty enters [his face] as he sinks his fingers into my flesh. My lips meet his and I feel like a white rabbit caught in the coils of a glistening black snake… Then I know that I love him."[745] Josephine's choice of animal metaphors are significant, for it is easy to recognise the racialised overtones which come from her labelling herself a white rabbit, a signifier of innocence, and George as a black snake which denotes a sinister evil. In addition, her use of the term "sacrifice" alongside the phrase "devour me Negro, devour me," conjures the propagandist narrative of the helpless, white Southern woman who had fallen victim to the clutches of the sexually-deviant black man. Pointing out Josephine's flaws is not to suggest that she was racist or anti-black, but rather to highlight the complexity of interracial relationships and the fact that the existence of such a relationship does not mean that each party were free of the racist sentiments, fetishes or biases.[746] Indeed, George too would sometimes engage in an apparent exotification of the physical contrasts between himself and his white wife, claiming that: "there is a certain affinity between individuals of opposite colors. The fascination of the unknown is so alluring that mutual stimulation is inevitable."[747]

Writing in *The American Mercury*, Josephine revealed her experience of being the white wife to a black man in Harlem. Addressing the perception that a white wife living within a black neighbourhood will receive hostility or be ostracised, Josephine contended that "the simple fact is that if a white person conducts himself in a dignified, friendly way in Harlem, he will be met in like manner."[748] She did, however, admit that occasionally "a colored person has expressed regret that George did not marry a woman of his own race," but concluded that her life in Harlem had been most satisfactory."[749] Of significance, however, was Josephine's confession that Philippa's birth "quieted all gossip that our marriage was just an 'adventure of which we soon would tire.'"[750] Although some commented that it was too bad Philippa's mother was white and others thought it was a shame her father was black, the validity of the Schuyler's interracial relationship was endorsed by the scores of people "intrigued by the fact that the offspring of a mixed marriage was a genius."[751]

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[745] Talalay, *Composition in Black and White,* p.29. Although it would be useful to know something of the context in which Josephine Schuyler was making this statement, the author has not been able to locate the original source that Talalay uses.
[746] A similar, broad point is made by Randall Kennedy, although not in relation to the Schuyler family. Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies,* p.37
[747] George Schuyler, *Slaves Today: A Story of Liberia* (1931, 1969) pp.183-184
[748] Schuyler, 'An Interracial Marriage,' p.275
[749] *Ibid.*
[750] *Ibid.*
[751] *Ibid.*

The Harlem Prodigy: Philippa's Prestigious Childhood

From the outset of her life Philippa Schuyler was thrust by her parents into the media spotlight, with the announcement of her birth appearing as front page news in leading African American newspapers such as the *Baltimore African American*.[752] As Schuyler became a toddler, her mother Josephine cultivated a relationship with the New York press by inviting black and white journalists to her birthday parties from the age of three until she turned thirteen.[753] These orchestrated media events were intended to showcase Schuyler's remarkable development year after year, and firmly place her array of talents in the public's mind.[754] Schuyler's mental development was tested at several institutions throughout 1936, with Dr Baker at Columbia University reporting her I.Q. to be 180, while academics at New York University registering an educational quotient (E.Q.) as 200 and her I.Q. to be between 179 and 185.[755] That Schuyler displayed excellent intellectual and dexterous development at an early age not only legitimised he parent's relationship, but also provided evidence that the products of interracial relationships would not result in degeneracy; thus fortifying the Schuyler familys' belief that she physically embodied the answer to America's growing racial and social problems. In particular, they saw the publicity surrounding Schuyler's achievements as a corrective to the popular denigration of African-Americans, and a useful rebuttal to fears regarding the offspring of interracial couples.[756] Explaining why she subjected her daughter to the pressures of numerous piano contests and recitals, Josephine claimed that it was "as much for the education of America as for the education of Philippa."[757] It is significant that Josephine chose the piano for this 'education,' as the piano served as an antiquated icon of respectability. Historian Ann Schofield has argued that respectability served as a surrogate for class in the class-less society of America, and that the piano was emblematic of this respectability.[758] Although Schofield argues that the piano lost its 'respectability' after the 1920s, when the notion of thrift juxtaposed the lavish displays of wealth characteristic of African-Americans such as A'Lelia Walker, it can also be construed that the Schuyler's consciously chose an icon of bygone decorum to demonstrate the genteel

[752] Streeter, *Tragic No More,* p.104
[753] *Ibid.* p.112
[754] *Ibid.*
[755] Talalay, *Composition in Black and White*, p.50; and Deems Taylor, 'Foreword,' in Philippa Duke Schuyler, *Adventures in Black and White*, (Robert Speller & Sons, New York, 1960) p.xii
[756] *Ibid.*
[757] *Ibid.*
[758] Ann Schofield, 'Respectability, Decadence and the American Piano,' paper delivered at the University of East Anglia Department of American Studies Research Seminar Series, November 4th 2015

refinement of their mixed-race daughter, and overturn dominant stereotypes about degenerate and immoral 'hybrids.' Self-taught historian and close friend to George Schuyler, J.A. Rogers concurred in 1940 that Philippa:

> seems to be the perfect child, physically, intellectually, and spiritually [who]… leaves not a single argument to the right wing anthropologists of the United States and England and their spiritual brethren in the Nazi universities in Germany who still maintain that race-mixing produces an inferior offspring… [and] is a great living argument about the doctrine of white racial superiority.[759]

Biographer Kathryn Talalay has charted Josephine Schuyler's early life and has deduced that as her family were farmers and cattle ranchers, she would have frequently heard talk around the dinner table about animal hybridisation.[760] Pointing to research such as the 1919 report by Professor Edward Murray East, which contended that the crossing of certain strains in corn yielded a new generation with increased size and productivity, Talalay suggests that Josephine was "convinced" the same could apply to human beings.[761] This interpretation can be linked to Josephine's belief that one day "…the Southern woman will eventually dilute the black and tint the white and create a legal mulatto civilisation in the south of the United States."[762] Regardless of how far the Schuyler family's thinking was indeed influenced by these genetic hybridisation theories, of paramount importance is the way in which the talents of Philippa's early life were exhibited to the media.

Time magazine, for instance, engaged in the adulation of Schuyler's talents at least twice between 1935 and 1936. Listing five noteworthy children, four of whom were white, in the United States under the heading 'Prodigious Crop,' the magazine claimed that a four-year-old Philippa "startles visitors by repeatedly spelling pneumonoultra-microscopicsilicovolcanoniosis [sic], informing them that it is the longest word in the English language. A forceful pianist, a determined rhymester, an avid reader of fourth grade books, Philippa has the added distinction of never having eaten cooked food."[763] In 1936, *Time*

[759] Quoted in: McNeil, *Sex and Race in the Black Atlantic,* p.38
[760] Talalay, *Composition in Black and White,* p.14
[761] *Ibid.*
[762] Talalay, *Composition in Black and White,* p.41
[763] 'Prodigious Crop,' *Time*, Vol.26 Issue 9, (August 26, 1935) p.29. Ironically, *Time*, and indeed other publications misspelled 'pneumonoultra-microscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis. Talalay, *Composition in Black and White*, p.48

magazine's music section focussed solely on Schuyler, the 'Harlem Prodigy,' as the youngest entrant to the National Guild of Piano Teachers' annual tournament.[764] The article gave a deeper biography of Schuyler than in 1935, noting that "prodigious at more than music," she is also "keen at mathematics, reads fourth-grade books, writes poetry, draws and paints, turns out neat letters on her father's type writer."[765] It is interesting to note that even within the same publication, Schuyler's biracial status was only sporadically remarked upon. In 1935, she was described as the "daughter of a Manhattan Negro writer," but in 1936 her biracial status was more clearly stated as the writer clarifies that she is the "Harlem-born daughter of a white mother and a coal-black father."[766] While admittedly a small point, this observation nonetheless highlights the pervasive tendency to homogenise people of biracial and mixed-race ancestry to the 'Negro' race, and provides yet another example of the ways in which the 'one-drop rule' permeated all sectors of American culture. Indeed, while George and Josephine were keen to not only invalidate arguments that interracial reproduction would result in intellectually-inferior offspring, as was so often concluded by scientists of the preceding decades, but to also quash notions of black inferiority; it is nonetheless important that some publications tended to categorise Schuyler as 'a Negro.'

The media's adulation of Schuyler's intellect and musical aptitude eventually caused a backlash which would negatively influence the course of Schuyler's adult life. The consistent presentation of Philippa as a child 'prodigy' did not fit with the Schuyler family's interpretation of her aptitude, as they instead argued that their extraordinary daughter was merely the result of hybrid genetics, proper nutrition, and intensive education.[767] Moreover, Schuyler's early reputation would taint her later life and career as a concert pianist, as Schuyler herself confided to her mother: "Of course it was the big build-up as a prodigy that angered the critics."[768] While the 'prodigy' label was a sore point for her parents, no childhood trademark could have prevented the change of public perception that occurred once Philippa reached maturity.

It was noted earlier that Caroline Streeter has identified age as a significant factor in the perception of mixed-race women in the United States. Sexual maturity required women of

[764] 'Harlem Prodigy,' *Time*, Vol.27 Issue 25, (June 22, 1936) p.44
[765] *Ibid.*
[766] 'Prodigious Crop,' *Time*, Vol.26 Issue 9, (August 26, 1935) p.29; and 'Harlem Prodigy,' *Time*, Vol.27 Issue 25, (June 22, 1936) p.44
[767] Talalay, *Composition in Black and White*, p.50
[768] Philippa Schuyler to Josephine Schuyler, April 26 1955. Schuyler Family Collection - Josephine Cogdell Lewis Schuyler Series, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, MG63, Box 72 Folder 13

black-white descent to become anchored in a single racial category which was, more often than not, the 'Negro' category. Although Schuyler was 'Negro' according to America's 'one-drop' rule, as the hybrid posterchild of a famous interracial couple she was decidedly 'mulatta' to the public mind.[769] As Schuyler aged and transitioned from an innocent child to one of African-America's "most beautiful women," she lost the ability to symbolise the bridge between the races; particularly because no adult equivalent existed within the public sphere for the space she occupied as a biracial child.[770] It is precisely for this reasons that 1934 to 1948, when Schuyler was aged three to sixteen, she experienced her highest visibility and popularity in the United States.[771] Indeed, her appearances in the white press became more sporadic during the 1950s. Charting the press attention Schuyler received during her concert tour of the Caribbean, Streeter has noted that the Caribbean media engaged in a deliberate strategy to slow her aging process, with some journalists under-reporting Schuyler's age by as many as three years.[772] The year 1953 marked Schuyler's official transition into adulthood when she performed at a classical recital in New York's Town Hall in May.[773] After this performance, Schuyler's image shifted within the back press from the biracial child genius to the world's most talented 'Negro' pianist, a designation Schuyler did not want. Despite her undeniable skill, the American classical music world remained almost exclusively white, leading Schuyler to pursue a career outside the United States. Unable to occupy a space within the American public sphere which matched her understanding of her own biracial heritage, Schuyler refashioned her identity.

"I am not a Negro:" The Creation of Felipa Monterro y Schuyler

The opening of the year 1960 sparked Schuyler's decision to refashion herself as Felipa Monterro y Schuyler, a woman of Iberian heritage who could join 'white ethnics' or 'off-whites' in a middle area away from black and white.[774] The construction of this new racial identity, and Schuyler's anti-black opinion can be traced in correspondence with her mother. In as early as 1954, Schuyler wrote a letter to Josephine while performing abroad, complaining that if George continued to tell people that she was 'a Negro,' the crowds would

[769] Streeter, *Tragic No More,* p.113
[770] *Ibid.* pp.106-107 and p.120
[771] *Ibid.* pp.106-107
[772] *Ibid.* p.120
[773] *Ibid.* p.123
[774] McNeil, *Sex and Race in the Black Atlantic,* pp.38-39

stay away from her concerts.[775] Then in May 1960, whilst travelling around Africa, Schuyler engaged in a vehement rant about her encounter with Kikuyu people in Kenya:

> Saw some Kikuyus in Kenya. God, they look dumb. It's hard not to think the British are superior. I mean, you've got to work awful hard to keep on believing all peoples are equal after seeing Kikuyus. Now that I find I have no relation to Africa at all, it's hard for me not to develop a certain sense of superiority to Africans, who REALLY ARE the most brutal, barbaric and dumb of any peoples I ever say anywhere. And it's hard NOT to think they are dumber than other people. They look and act SO stupid.[776]

Within the same letter, Schuyler gave an entirely different account of her time in Madagascar. She began by contending that "This IS NOT AFRICA. THIS IS THE ORIENT," before providing her take on Madagascan people and culture: "It is so obvious that these people are of Malayan descent … Their music is like Philippino, [sic] Samaan and Hawaiian music – sweet, lazy, melodic, relaxed. No orgiastic frenzies. TOTALLY unlike African music… They have no barbaric customs. Their manners are like the Malayans – agreeable, sweet, happy-go-lucky, relaxed, pleasant, non-aggressive." Of particular significance amongst her racist ramblings, is evidence of Schuyler's own identification with the Madagascan people:

> Everyone says I look just like a Malgache [sic] girl, and I can see why, all my life, people have taken me for an Oriental. Actually, since my ancestors came from here, I HAVE NO RELATION TO AFRICA AT ALL, which explains why I'm so bright. This island isn't Africa any more than Cyprus is. So I am Malay – American Indian – and European.[777]

That she claimed Madagascans "look down on Africans and I don't blame them," arguably highlights Schuyler's disdain for the African race, to the extent that over the coming years she actively began to distance herself from any association with the black race, and instead

[775] Philippa Schuyler to Josephine Schuyler, September 22 1954. Schuyler Family Collection - Josephine Cogdell Lewis Schuyler Series, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, MG63, Box 72 Folder 12
[776] Philippa Schuyler to Josephine Schuyler, May 12 1960. Schuyler Family Collection - Josephine Cogdell Lewis Schuyler Series, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. MG63, Box 72 Folder 17
[777] *Ibid.*

reconstruct a new, more 'attractive' racial identity. In February 1962, Schuyler wrote to Josephine stating that she no longer wanted the word 'Negro' associated with her in print: "I don't want that word associated with me, I am NOT going to ruin my life by carrying segregation against myself wherever I go. Also, NOWHERE in my forthcoming book do I want the word Negro or colored mentioned in connection with me. NOWHERE. I don't want it said that George is a 'Negro journalist' either."[778]

Six months later, she wrote to her mother again complaining about her appearance on the cover of *Sepia* magazine, and ordered her to "not let any journal call me what SEPIA called me on the cover. I don't want that word attached to me in any way… I don't WANT that appellation…I WILL not have that word associated with me. No one on this continent associates it with me. Why should they on any other continent? I won't have it."[779] It would appear that the *Sepia* cover in question relates to the June issue, which uses the word 'Negro' alongside a photograph of Schuyler. However, her extreme reaction is puzzling when it is considered that within this issue, is an article authored by Schuyler entitled 'My Black and White World' in which she explicitly explained that she is the product of a mixed marriage:

> My life has been different! My mother is white. My father is a Negro. I am the product of a mixed marriage. I live in a contrasting black and white world. This world has been happy! Some people scream at the thought of this… but I have rejoiced in it! For there is love in my home. My parents' mixed marriage has been a good one![780]

As the article continues, Schuyler acknowledged the existence of the 'tragic mulatta' within popular culture which generally depicts a beautiful heroine "full of inferiority complexes" who struggles to find her place in the world and eventually falls victim to a tragic death. Challenging this perception, Schuyler argued that in reality the fate of biracial individuals depends on "the country, the time, [and] the situation," before going on to give examples of successful biracial individuals across the world. Considering the apparent disdain for the African race Schuyler expressed in her letter to Josephine in August, and the intensity with

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[778] Philippa Schuyler to Josephine Schuyler, February 11 1962. Schuyler Family Collection - Josephine Cogdell Lewis Schuyler Series, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. MG63, Box 72 Folder 19
[779] Philippa Schuyler to Josephine Schuyler, August 3 1962. Schuyler Family Collection - Josephine Cogdell Lewis Schuyler Series, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. MG63, Box 72 Folder 19
[780] Philippa Schuyler, 'My Black and White World,' *Sepia*, June 1962, p.10. Schuyler Family Collection - Philippa Duke Schuyler Series, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, MG63, Box 60 Folder 5

which she argued that she was “Malay – American Indian – and European,” it is somewhat surprising that only two months prior she published an article detailing the fictitious traits said to preoccupy ‘tragic’ biracial individuals. Indeed, it is particularly noteworthy that within the article she claimed: “Pathetically eager to be considered white, aggressively determined to be accepted as Oriental or African, their status is generally deemed romantic, nerve-wracking, unstable, and undesirable.”[781] A seemingly ironic line when read alongside Schuyler’s personal correspondence, her tenacious effort to identify as ‘non-black’ continued in the years leading to her death. In a 1963 letter to her mother, written while overseas, Schuyler explained why she wanted her entry in the book *The Negro in America* to be covered up by explaining that:

> I look like any other of the Sicilians, Greeks, Spaniards or Portuguese here in Rome. I am not a Negro, and won’t stand for being called one in a book that will circulate in countries where that taint has not been applied to me… I had 30 miserable years in the USA because of having the taint of being a ‘strange curiosity’ applied to me, and I sure don’t want to bring that taint along with me to a foreign country and thus have 30 more miserable years.[782]

While it is tempting to relegate Schuyler’s conflicting stance on her own racial identity as ‘tragic’ or ‘full of inferiority complexes,’ it is also lazy scholarship. Biographer Talalay suggests that Schuyler’s pursuit of an identity outside the white-black binary represented ‘self-hatred,’ but Daniel McNeil argues that her decision to reject her father’s African ancestry can equally be viewed as “a form of self-fashioning on the road towards becoming a creative artist of color.”[783] Highlighting that Schuyler also distanced herself from her mother’s whiteness and invented a ‘Latin’ background for Josephine in order to become ‘off-white’ femme fatale, McNeil calls for a more thorough consideration of the ways in which Philippa constructed her identity.[784]

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[781] Philippa Schuyler, ‘My Black and White World,’ *Sepia*, June 1962, p.10. Schuyler Family Collection - Philippa Duke Schuyler Series, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, MG63, Box 60 Folder 5
[782] Philippa Schuyler to Josephine Schuyler, 16 May 1963. Schuyler Family Collection Philippa Duke Schuyler Series, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Also quoted in: McNeil, *Sex and Race in the Black Atlantic,* p.38
[783] McNeil, *Sex and Race in the Black Atlantic,* p.39
[784] *Ibid.*

An undated autobiographical essay written in French lies within Schuyler's personal papers at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, entitled 'Une Metisse a la Recherche de Son Ame,' or 'A Mixed-Race [Woman] Searches Her Soul.'[785] This essay goes some way to elucidate the argument put forth by McNeil that Schuyler endeavoured to become a "creative artist of color."[786] Under the sub-heading 'The Racial Hell,' Philippa opens the essay by stating: "My name is Philippa Schuyler. I am mixed-race. My father is a man of colour, my mother is white. And I do not have any shame. Despite the fact that I've suffered often in the United States, my birth country, I am proud of my origins."[787] Speaking to her racial heritage, Schuyler contends that "a curious and exotic mix of blood runs in my veins… Through my father, a New York editor, I am Malagasy, Native American, Portuguese and Dutch. Through my mother, a writer from Texas, I am Latino and Anglo-Saxon."[788] It is significant that she does not mention her father's African heritage but instead emphasises her Latino and Portuguese heritage. Her decision to declare that her father is a mix of Malagasy, links to her 1960 correspondence with Josephine in which she expressed a physical and cultural identification with the Madagascan people during her time in Tananarive. It can be argued that these steps were consciously taken to help solidify and legitimise her refashioning as Felipa Monterro y Schuyler.

In the years following her death in 1967, Schuyler fell victim to the 'tragic mulatta' stereotype as scholars attributed her staunch opposition to African decolonisation as indicative of a psychologically troubled woman uncomfortable with her black heritage.[789] Schuyler's difficulty in finding a racial identity which fitted her own perception of her mixed-racial heritage, however, highlights the way in which the binary system of racial classification within the United States effected the lived experience of biracial women. Unable to identify a space which satisfied her perception of her racial identity, Schuyler chose to craft a new place for herself in the ethnically-ambiguous 'exotic' category.

Another example of the way in which Schuyler's life has been framed by the 'tragic mulatta' stereotype, lies in interpretations of her late-term abortion. Indeed, her decision to

[785] Philippa Schuyler, 'Une Metisse a la Recherche de Son Ame,' translated from French by Paul M.M. Cooper (2016). Schuyler Family Collection - Philippa Duke Schuyler Series, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, MG63 Box 61 Folder 4

[786] McNeil, *Sex and Race in the Black Atlantic,* p.39

[787] Schuyler, 'Une Metisse a la Recherche de Son Ame,' p.1

[788] *Ibid.*

[789] For an analysis of the way in which the 'tragic mulatto' cliché has been applied to the life of Philippa Schuyler, please see: McNeil, 'Black Devils, White Saints and Mixed-Race Femme Fatales,' pp.360-376

abort her pregnancy in 1964 has been viewed by historians such as Daniel McNeil as evidence that she had internalised anti-black racism and therefore did not want to give birth to a black man's child.[790] Rather than adhering to this presumption, it is more useful to place this action within the context of other women examined throughout this thesis, and consider the articulations of the women Schuyler was in contact with. In particular, it has been shown that many of her contemporaries, including Angelina Weld Grimké and Georgia Douglas Johnson wrote about the fear of giving birth to a child of colour within the racially tumultuous United States. It could be therefore be contended that her decision reflected the distress experienced by many women of colour faced with the prospect of raising a child at risk of violent racism, and that her wealth merely afforded her the luxury of choice. More importantly, however, it must be acknowledged that none of these speculations may be accurate, and that Schuyler simply chose to exercise her right to control her body, and did not want to continue the pregnancy for personal reasons unrelated to race. While this research has chosen to draw no final conclusion on the matter, it will argue that the facts simply cannot be determined, and that conjecture of this manner serves no value, and merely perpetuates the 'tragic mulatta' stereotype.

Conclusion

Through an examination of private testimony, published writings and personal correspondence, this chapter has shown the multifaceted lived experiences of two biracial women across the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. While a number of parallels existed across the lives of both Angelina Weld Grimké and Philippa Schuyler, such as being born to a white mother within the institution of marriage, the differing ways in which they negotiated their biracial identity highlights the nuanced ways in which race was understood and experienced. Despite their 'legitimacy' and the fact that they were born over fifty years apart, neither identified as black-white biracial. While Grimké chose to identify as an African-American woman and fully engaged herself with the African-American intelligentsia in Washington DC, Schuyler crafted the Felipa Monterro y Schuyler. One explanation for these variances, may surround the fact that Grimké was abandoned by her white mother and raised by her father's family, arguably meaning that in the absence of a white figurehead she had little choice other than to identify with her black family. On the other hand Schuyler's parents remained together, and as a famous interracial couple with a high public profile, she

[790] McNeil, 'Black Devils, White Saints and Mixed-Race *Femme Fatales*,' p.372

was unable to distance herself from the 'mulatta' categorisation. Within the context of 1940s and 1950s America, the label 'mulatta' did not fit her own self-perception, and so Schuyler created her own "off-white" identity.[791]

Building on Caroline Streeter's argument that age formed a crucial factor in the perception towards biracial women, this chapter has also shown that age formed a significant catalyst to the major changes in the lives of both Grimké and Schuyler. Grimké was seven years old when Sarah returned her to Archibald, and although Grimké had not yet reached sexual maturity, her biracial heritage up to this point had been framed by her childhood innocence and her ability to potentially defuse any familial disapproval surrounding her parents' interracial marriage. At the age of seven, Sarah suggested that Grimké's race was now more perceptible to others as well as Grimké herself.[792] For Schuyler, age became an issue at a later stage. In 1953, only a few months before her twenty-second birthday, Schuyler's performance at a classical recital in New York's Town Hall marked her official transition into adulthood, as she was no longer the biracial child genius but the world's most talented 'Negro' pianist.[793] For both women, whether at the age of seven or twenty-one, their ability to symbolise a bridge between the races was curbed, and no adult equivalent existed within the public sphere for the space they both occupied as biracial children.

Overall, this chapter has explored the rarely-examined experience of being born to a white mother and black father. It built upon Chapters One and Two by further situating the lived experiences of mixed-race women within the context of their cultural environment, and elucidating the various ways in which these women negotiated the complex contours of racial identity during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century.

[791] McNeil, *Sex and Race in the Black Atlantic,* p.39
[792] Sarah Stanley Grimké to Archibald Grimké, April 25, 1887. Archibald H. Grimké Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Center, Howard University, Box 39-3, Folder 79
[793] Streeter, *Tragic No More,* p.123

Epilogue

On Saturday 19th May 2018, Meghan Markle, a mixed-race American woman, married Prince Harry the sixth-in-line to the British throne and became a member of the Royal Family. As news of the interracial relationship broke around the world, the British and American media pondered what such a pairing would mean for both the British monarchy, and society at large.[794] In some publications, the couple were deemed representative of a post-racial utopia. In others, Markle suffered harsh criticism on a variety of issues ranging from her marital status as a divorced woman to her style, her Californian childhood, and most significantly, her race. The only daughter of cinematographer Thomas Markle and Doria Ragland, a social worker and yoga instructor, Markle grew up in a prosperous, largely white, Los Angeles neighbourhood. Before meeting Prince Harry, Markle worked not only as an actress, but as an advocate for the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. Through her relationship with Prince Harry, Markle infiltrated arguably the highest echelon of aristocratic society: the British Royal Family, but despite her credentials as a successful woman in her own right, her eligibility for such entry was widely criticised, and she was frequently framed as a disruptive 'outsider' by the media.

Throughout her relationship with Prince Harry, the scrutiny that Markle has endured is particularly insidious when compared to that elicited against Kate Middleton. Upon confirmation of her engagement to Harry's brother, Prince William in 2010, the media partook in an examination of Kate's heritage, and framed their marriage in a 'happily-ever-after,' Cinderella-esque trope. Much rhetoric focused on the fact that Kate was not a member of the aristocracy, in spite of the fact that she attended the £38,000 a year boarding school Marlborough College, and that her parents were millionaires.[795] None of this mattered, as in the words of the media, Kate was a "commoner" according to traditional British class distinction. However elitist this rhetoric may seem this, it pales in comparison to that placed on Markle. Playing on the popular fairy-tale narrative usually ascribed to "commoners" who marry into the Royal Family, Margo Jefferson highlights that Markle is no 'Cinderella' by citing her now famous line that: "It's time to focus less on glass slippers and more on glass

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[794] Alexander Smith, 'Meghan Markle and British racism: What her saga says to black Britons,' *NBC News,* February 10, 2020. Accessed online via: https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/meghan-markle-british-racism-what-her-saga-says-black-britons-n1132181

[795] Anthony Faiola, 'Kate's a Commoner, but a Wealthy One,' *Seattle Times*, December 25, 2010

ceilings."[796] As a successful actor, blogger, and calligrapher, as well as a politically active and outspoken advocate for gender equality, Markle's life and career defied royal conventions. Cecilia Rodriguez agrees, and points out that "She's not just a 'commoner' like Prince William's wife, Kate Middleton... Markle's image as a 36-year-old divorced, politically progressive, biracial, feminist American couldn't make her less 'royal.'"[797] Reports frequently referring to Markle as "a 35-year-old American divorcee," suggested that she might have been more closely compared to Wallace Simpson, the last American "divorcee," to forge a public relationship with a member of the Royal Family. However, it can be argued that rather than focussing on her status as an independent American 'outsider,' discourse surrounding Markle's life have been primarily framed by her mixed-race heritage.

Recognising the racialised tone of many early reports on their relationship Prince Harry spoke out in an unprecedented move to denounce such editorials. Through a statement issued by the Communications Secretary, Prince Harry condemned the "wave of abuse and harassment" that Markle had been subjected to, and specifically called out "the racial undertones of comment pieces; and the outright sexism and racism of social media trolls and web article comments."[798] He was not alone in his identification of the racist connotations and allusions made by the tabloid press. Afua Hirsch summed these undertones well a few days prior to the official statement, by contending: "It's a subtle point, easily missed. Meghan Markle… is a 'glamourous brunette,' 'a departure from [his] usual type' and 'not in the society blonde style of previous girlfriends'... I think what they are trying to say is that Markle, actor, global development ambassador, and lifestyle blogger, is black."[799]

Markle's Los Angeles roots have also been framed as problematic, as commentators have connected her mother's home with long-standing stereotypes which reinforce racialised notions of crime and gang warfare. In November 2016, *The Daily Mail* published an article with the headline: "Harry's girl is (almost) straight outta Compton: Gang-scarred home of her

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[796] Margo Jefferson, 'No Cinderella: Margo Jefferson on the real Meghan Markle,' *The Guardian*, May 5, 2018
[797] Cecilia Rodriguez, 'Meghan Markle, Prince Harry's Royal Wedding: The Race Factor And Its Effect On The British Monarchy,' *Forbes Online,* May 13, 2018.
https://www.forbes.com/sites/ceciliarodriguez/2018/05/13/meghan-markle-prince-harrys-royal-wedding-the-race-factor-and-its-effect-on-the-british-monarchy/#1eebe944156d
[798] A Statement by the Communications Secretary to Prince Harry 8 November 2016
https://www.royal.uk/statement-communications-secretary-prince-harry Following the initiation of legal actions against a series of media outlets, in early 2020 Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, took a step back as senior members of the Royal Family and decided to work towards financial independence. Helen Lewis, 'Harry and Meghan Won't Play the Game,' *The Atlantic*, January 9, 2020; and Afua Hirsch, 'Black Britons Know Why Meghan Markle Wants Out: It's the Racism,' *New York Times*, January 9, 2020
[799] Afua Hirsch, 'Meghan Markle, Prince Harry and the Myth of Royal Purity,' *The Guardian,* Wed 2 Nov 2016

mother revealed – so will he be dropping by for tea?"[800] Juxtaposing Ragland's neighbourhood to that of the royals, the article opens by claiming: "Plagued by crime and riddled with street gangs, the troubled Los Angeles neighbourhood that Doria Ragland, 60, calls home couldn't be more different to London's leafy Kensington."[801] Building on commentary which linked her mother's dread-locked hair to black racial politics, the article referenced local gangs such as the Crenshaw Mafia Gangster, "which has been plaguing the area since 1981," and the Westside Rollin' 60's Neighborhood Crips. By doing so, the article reinforces popular stereotypes about black identity and gang warfare. Journalist Steven Erlanger has similarly highlighted that by detailing the "gang-scarred" neighbourhood with its "tatty one-story homes" alongside the area's crime statistics for, the article weaves together various racial stereotypes.[802] In addition Margo Jefferson points out that these undertones cast Doria "as 'a dreadlocked African American lady from the wrong side of the tracks.' One whose career as a yoga instructor and social worker suddenly made her the equivalent of the mulatta's disreputable mother, who gathers roots and practises hoodoo."[803] Indeed, the life, political opinions and physical appearance of Markle's mother, Doria, have also been surveyed by the press. As an African-American woman who lives in LA, wears her hair in dreadlocks and has a nose piercing, allusions were continuously made to the Black Panthers and black racial politics, and it was widely posited that she would bring political upheaval to the Royal family through her relationship as a mother-in-law to Prince Harry.

In another tone, Markle's race has been connected to the notion of progression, with many popular tabloids claiming that her mixed-race heritage will be an interesting addition to the Royal bloodline. Writing for the Mail on Sunday, for instance, journalist Rachel Johnson claimed that: "Genetically, [Markle] is blessed. If there is issue from her alleged union with Prince Harry, the Windsors will thicken their watery, thin blue blood and Spencer pale skin and ginger hair with some rich and exotic DNA."[804] Public preoccupation with Markle's genes received fever pitch when it was announced that the couple were expecting their first child.

[800] *The Daily Mail,* 2 November 2016
[801] *Ibid*
[802] Steven Erlanger, 'Prince Denounces 'Smear' in Coverage of His Girlfriend,' *New York Times*, 9 November 2016
[803] Margo Jefferson, 'No Cinderella: Margo Jefferson on the real Meghan Markle,' *The Guardian*, May 5, 2018
[804] Rachel Johnson, 'Sorry Harry, but your Beautiful Bolster has Failed my Mum Test,' *The Mail on Sunday*, November 6, 2016

Throughout her pregnancy, her mixed-race body was placed under intense scrutiny. Paparazzi photos which caught mere glimpses of her baby bump accompanied speculations that she was too large to be carrying just one baby, according to her estimated date, and it was widely reasoned she must be having twins. She also committed the 'faux-pas' of touching her bump too much while in the public sphere, which provoked publications such as *People* magazine to question: "Has Meghan Markle lost her Sparkle?"[805] The racial undertones which characterised coverage of her relationship permeated reporting of her pregnancy. Much of the discourse focussed on a sense of curiosity regarding who the baby would look like. While it can be argued that it is natural to consider whether an unborn baby will favour their mother or father, such rhetoric raised undeniable racial connotations. BBC radio host Danny Baker, for instance, tweeted a photograph of a monkey dressed in a suit and holding hands with a couple alongside the caption: "Royal baby leaves hospital." After public outcry, Baker apologised by denying an awareness of the implications that linking such a photo to a person of colour would pose. Commentary around the incident generally consisted of two stances: those who were appalled by the blatant racist undertones, and those who argued that the tweet was "just a joke."

Some of the more positive, yet problematic, portrayals of Markle have focussed on her perceived beauty. In the UK, magazines and morning chat shows demonstrated a commitment to achieving what came to be known as the 'Markle Sparkle.' Despite the fact that Markle is of black-white heritage, the beauty segments of such pieces consistently tailored their showcasing of beauty products to a white audience. Foundations chosen were frequently from cosmetic ranges that almost exclusively cater to white women. ITV's *Lorraine* show ran a competition to find a Meghan Markle lookalike, but none of the finalists shared Meghan's racial heritage. Instead, all three finalists had the features that people frequently ascribe to slightly non-white women – dark hair, dark eyes, and olive skin. In the minds of the, predominately white, *Lorraine* presenters and its voting audience, these women looked mixed or ethnically ambiguous enough to emulate Meghan Markle, without actually possessing black heritage.

This 'whitewashing' of Markle's mixed-race heritage not only negates an important part of her identity, but can also be extended to many sectors of contemporary society. In particular, it can be argued that the mixed-race aesthetic is currently 'on trend,' minus any

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[805] *People*, 28 January 2019. Last accessed online 6th December 2019

allusion to black heritage. Physical features such as a curvy posterior, large lips, tanned skin, and thick dark eyebrows are all intimately tied to the black female form, but are features which women of colour have battled for centuries to be accepted. In this moment in time in the twenty-first, however, these features are deemed desirable, on white women's bodies. In other words, it can be argued that the mixed-race aesthetic has been 'made white,' and co-opted by white women as their own. Even though Markle's black heritage is well-known, this more 'acceptable' depiction of otherness has dominated popular culture. Despite Markle's black heritage being well-known, the 'Markle Sparkle' effect has not led to mixed-race bodies being catapulted onto the covers of magazines, but rather white women with long dark hair, tanned skin and a 'black girl's booty' taking centre stage. This observation has been shared by many young women of black and mixed-race heritage, and Charlie Brinkhurst-Cuff's piece for *The Guardian* articulates this frustration well. Brinkhurst-Cuff, for instance, argues that while that positive representation of the black female body is important, the fact that it is a 'trend' means this positivity can all too easily disappear again, to the detriment of black and ethnic minority women.[806]

This observation demonstrates that black and mixed-race bodies continue to be contested. Historically, physical features associated with black heritage have not only been ridiculed and deemed unattractive, but 'scientifically' analysed and used to justify the oppression and sexual exploitation of black and mixed-race women. While the aspirations of bloggers, influencers, magazines, and the media in general focuses on 'gym bunny booty gains,' it is impossible to ignore the parallel to historic individuals such as Saartjie Baartman, whose body was interrogated and condemned by scientists, who used her physical features to validate theories of black inferiority. In the early twentieth-century, possessing the physical aesthetic of a person with mixed-ancestry, such as light brown skin and straight hair, could lead to social denigration. Ironically, within black communities, the light-brown skinned 'New Negro' woman was a symbol of racial pride and modernity, without any motivation to allude to mixed-white heritage. During the early twentieth century, many mixed-race women, unable to identify as 'mixed' without facing stereotypes such as 'sexually-deviant' or 'physiologically unstable,' attributed their physical features to alternative ethnic identities, and mixed-race bodies were made Mediterranean, Native American or 'Oriental.' Similar to the 'Markle Sparkle' effect, embodying an appearance which adhered to 'on-trend' beauty

[806] Charlie Brinkhurst-Cuff, 'My Body Shape May be in Fashion Just Now, But For How Long?' *The Guardian,* July 30, 2017

norms, but remained disconnected from any allusion to mixed-race or black heritage, dominated popular standards of beauty.

The way in which Markle and her relationship with Prince Harry has been received by the public, exposes a significant parallel to the lives of the women examined throughout this thesis. Indeed, it can be contended that Markle has been framed in the modern media according to the same tropes that mixed-race women were pigeon-holed into a century ago. By focussing on her status as a divorced woman, for instance, the press reworked the historic, sexually-promiscuous Jezebel stereotype, and cast Markle as a woman with a dishonourable past. Eager to dig up a salacious story from her ex-husband, members of the press went as far as to offer her ex-partner money in exchange for an exclusive insight into Markle's romantic past.[807] Furthermore, it can also be argued that Markle's tumultuous relationship with both her father and white half-siblings, which dominated media coverage preceding the couple's wedding in May 2018, alluded to the 'marginal man' stereotype. It was shown in the Introduction of this thesis, that the 'marginal man' stereotype was defined by twentieth century eugenicists as "one who is poised in psychological uncertainty between two (or more) social worlds; reflecting in his soul the discords and harmonies, repulsions and attractions of their worlds."[808] This notion of experiencing a difficulty in navigating both sides of the colour line has also characterised many of the more favourable, yet still problematic, articles which have detailed Markle's childhood as the daughter of an interracial couple. Although intended to reveal a human experience, and shed light on Markle's early life, such anecdotes serve to reinforce old stereotypes which cast people of mixed-race as 'unhappy' and 'unstable' hybrids.'

Markle, herself, has acknowledged the existence of a contested middle-ground of racial identity, without reducing such a reality to this 'marginal man' stereotype. Speaking to *ELLE Magazine* in 2015, Markle considered that: "to describe something as being black and white means it is clearly defined. Yet when your ethnicity is black and white, the dichotomy is not that clear. In fact, it creates a grey area."[809] Markle does not let this "grey area" define her self-identification, but instead claims to embrace it, stating that "You create the identity you want for yourself."[810] It is significant that Markle makes this statement in 2015, decades

[807] A Statement by the Communications Secretary to Prince Harry. 8 November 2016
[808] Park, 'Human Migration and the Marginal Man,' p.60
[809] Meghan Markle, 'I'm More Than An 'Other,'' *Elle Magazine*, December 22, 2016. Accessed via: https://www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/news/a26855/more-than-an-other/
[810] *Ibid.*

after Philippa Schuyler refashioned herself as Felipa Monterro y Schuyler in order to craft an identity which allowed her to occupy a space within the American public sphere that more accurately matched her understanding of her own heritage. While parallels can be drawn between the experience Markle and Schuyler shared as biracial women in the United States, it is worth pointing out that Markle does not suggest crafting a new racial identity in response to such challenging realities, but rather to cultivate a life with people who do not lead with ethnic descriptions, and instead to think about identity in terms of the non-racial factors that make up a person's identity, such as: "I'm an actress, a writer, the Editor-in-Chief of my lifestyle brand The Tig, a pretty good cook and a firm believer in handwritten notes."[811] Nonetheless, it is still significant that conversations about negotiating identity continue to permeate the lives of twenty-first century women.[812]

Furthermore, in her analysis of a *Vanity Fair* article, literary scholar Rachael McLennan has examined the use of the article's claim that Markle "adds a new wrinkle: her mother is black, her father white." Honing in on this phrasing, McLennan suggests that the article positions Markle's mixed-race identity as a 'wrinkle,' and as a result communicates a number of meanings.[813] To begin, Markle's age has frequently been identified as a negative aspect of her identity. Five months older than Kate, ten months older than Prince William, and three years older than Prince Harry, her status as the older woman has permeated commentary on her entry into the family. Wrinkles are usually considered something to be disguised or erased, whether on clothes or on one's face, and McLennan highlights that the well-known notion of "ironing out the wrinkles" suggests eliminating a problem. With that in mind, McLennan then posits whether the *Vanity Fair* article suggests that Markle's mixed-race identity is being presented as something which can be 'smoothed out' or managed, just like a wrinkle. This is an interesting observation, and one which can be directly linked to Chapter Three of this thesis, which explored the significance of age in the framing of mixed-race women. In particular, it was shown that age formed an important factor in the lives of Angelina Weld Grimké and Philippa Schuyler. The way in which the media and the wider public viewed Schuyler, in particular, upon reaching adulthood resonates with the rhetoric

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[811] *Ibid.*

[812] Dahleen Glanton, 'African Americans know Meghan Markle is Black. Yet many whites want to call her something else,' *Chicago Tribune*, January 16, 2020. Accessed via: https://www.chicagotribune.com/columns/dahleen-glanton/ct-dahleen-glanton-meghan-markle-barack-obama-biracial-20200116-o5ip7lbhf5hxboisnfqr5tby6y-story.html

[813] Rachael McLennan, 'A New Wrinkle: Age, Race and Writing Meghan Markle,' paper delivered at the University of East Anglia, 2019

associated with Markle regarding her age. This thesis has argued that upon reaching adulthood, mixed-race children such as Grimké and Schuyler lost the ability to symbolise the 'bridge' between the races.

Ultimately, the parallels which can be drawn between Markle and the women examined in this study, highlight the significance of this thesis, and that many of the issues addressed by this thesis are still relevant in the twenty-first century.

This thesis has examined the lived experiences of mixed-race and biracial women within the United States during the early twentieth century. By highlighting the significant ways in which skin tone, physical appearance, and stereotypes about mixed-racial heritage shaped the lives of mixed-race women, this thesis has complicated understandings of race during the early twentieth century, and exposed that many of these factors continue. Over the course of three chapters, it explored how the phenotypical features typically associated with mixed-race heritage took on multiple meanings within the context of black communities, precisely at a time when black cultural identity was being redefined. In addition, it gave voice to mixed-race women by placing an emphasis on their distinct understandings of race during the early twentieth century through personal and creative articulations about their experience; before honing in more specifically to analyse the lives of two biracial women born to a white mother and a black father whose lives traced the temporal breadth of this thesis.

Chapter One opened this study by analysing the complex reality of inhabiting a phenotypically 'mixed-race' body during the early-twentieth century. The chapter's focus on the use of skin bleaching creams and hair-straightening preparations worked to extend the work of existing studies which adhere to Frantz Fanon's 'self-hate thesis.' When applied to the context of the United States, Fanon's theory suggests that the privileging of Euro-American physical features lead many African-Americans to internalise the notion that dark skin and "kinky hair" were the antithesis to Caucasian 'ideal.' Many scholars engaged in anti-racist discourse have aligned with this theory, and argue that African-Americans who historically chose to physically change their appearance through the use of cosmetic products had fallen prey to internalised racism. While not disagreeing with these contentions, this chapter emphasised the importance of looking beyond the dominant 'self-hate' thesis to further understandings of how colourism really operated within the context of the early twentieth century, and better discern the motivations behind skin bleaching and hair straightening. The central aim of this chapter was to therefore consider the various

socialisation practices and cultural contexts which influenced perceptions of such practices within African-American communities. With these considerations in mind, it was shown that the beauty, well-groomed appearance and light brown skin of the idealised 'New Negro' woman signified an active participation in American consumerism, and engagement with urban modernity that was unique to the context of the early-twentieth century, and embodied a step away from the privileging of white heritage valued by historic 'blue vein societies.'[814]

Building on historian Deborah Thomas's research, this chapter argued that by re-signifying Euro-American cultural customs, African-Americans aspired to a modernity of their own making within the context of their own communities.[815] Often presided over by black women, the beauty parlour not only held civic significance, but also provided a safe space and period of respite from the harsh realities of Jim Crow America.[816] An invitation to sit in the beauty shop chair was met with pride, as it often denoted an important step to black womanhood.[817] The exclusion of individuals already possessing 'good hair' from this ritual, could form a barrier to the intimacy awarded by participation in the parlour regime, and render them an outsider within their own community. The civic and cultural significance, the intimate and emotional connections, and communal socialisation which characterised the black beauty parlour can be directly linked to Shirley Anne Tate's contention that the beauty practices popular within black communities were "given meaning and value within a Black aesthetic space."[818]

Focus then shifted to the manipulation of skin tone, and it was shown that alongside the maintenance of 'groomed' hair, the ability to manipulate and refashion one's identity through skin-altering cosmetics signified an engagement with modern, middle-class consumerism. Juxtaposing the popularity of skin tanning across white-America with the practice of skin bleaching in African-American communities, the attainment of 'golden-brown' skin was aspirational across racial lines. For white Americans, the acquisition of tanned skin symbolised an affluent lifestyle, while for African-Americans, a lighter skin tone symbolised upward mobility to a higher paid position which required working indoors. In contrasting ways, light brown skin signified the attainment of middle-class status. For white women, the pursuit of a tanned complexion was not motivated by a desire to insinuate a

[814] Kerr, 'The Paper Bag Principle: Of the Myth and the Motion of Colorism,' pp.271-278
[815] Thomas, *Modern Blackness,* p.8
[816] Walker, *Style and Status*, p.62; and Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women*, p.58 and p.103
[817] Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women*, p.99
[818] Tate, *Black Beauty,* p.112

genetic connection to 'blackness' or the African-American race. Instead, any mentions of non-white beauty in tanning advertisements revered "brown-skinned Nubian princesses and Indian maidens," and alluded to mythologies of the remote and colonised rather than the "lowly and local" African-American.[819] Allusions to the 'exotic' similarly permeated the advertising strategies of black-owned businesses, who tapped into New Negro intellectual debate surrounding Egypt by alluding to the cultural significance of Cleopatra as an ancient emblem of black women's beauty.[820]

It is important to consider how the 'exoticisation' of non-white features in beauty advertisements may have influenced the way in which the women who naturally embodied the aesthetic of light brown skin and straight hair negotiated their physicality. Within certain African-American communities, naturally-occurring light-skin and straight hair could symbolise the painful history of sexual exploitation, leading people of mixed black-white descent to be shunned.[821] As a result, many men and women of mixed-racial heritage attempted to negotiate a desirable racial identity more in line with personal experience, affiliations, and aspirations. This was further underscored in Chapter Two and Three, through the testimony of Anita Thompson Reynolds who identified as "café au lait," and used the pseudonym Matelle to 'pass' as Mexican for a film role; and Philippa Schuyler who rejected her black-white biracial identity and decided to pass full-time as an 'Iberian' named Felipa Monterro y Schuyler.[822] In each of these cases, Reynolds and Schuyler avoided any affiliation with both the black and the white aspects of their heritage, opting instead to claim a more 'socially desirable' identity.

Overall, Chapter One sought to look beyond existing interpretations of African-American beauty practices, and shed light on the multiple motivations which encouraged individuals to bleach their skin and chemically straighten their hair. While it is impossible to deny that many African-Americans internalised self-hate as a result of the propagation of such standards, this chapter recognised the motivations which existed behind these practices. It stressed that reverting to the dominant narrative of race shame or self-hate ignores the reality that many of these people identified as black, lived within the black community, and

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[819] Haidarali, *Brown Beauty,* p.94

[820] Peiss, *Hope in a Jar,* p.220

[821] For further discussion of the contempt within African-American communities towards mixed-race people with black-white heritage please see Davis, *Who is Black?*, pp.57-58 and pp.134-139

[822] Reynolds, *American Cocktail,* p.86; Streeter, *Tragic No More*, p.120; and McNeil, *Sex and Race in the Black Atlantic,* pp.38-39

spent their money in black businesses. It is therefore incredibly valuable to situate individuals who engaged in appearance-altering regimes within the cultural context of their time in order to gain a more thorough understanding of how standards of beauty truly operated during the early twentieth century. It also shed light on what such motivations and practices meant for mixed-race women who naturally embodied these features. As mixed-race women naturally embodied the idealised features of the time, engagement in black beauty practices was rendered unnecessary, so in an attempt to evade the negative associations derived from their appearance, many mixed-race Americans consciously negotiated and 'exoticised' their heritage to reconfigure a new, more socially-acceptable identity.

Chapter Two of this thesis examined how mixed-race women understood and positioned their heritage and racial identity within the context of dominant cultural, sociological and scientific ideas about racial mixture. While other scholarly analyses homogenise the work of African-American female writers into that of the broader New Negro Renaissance literary scene, this chapter focused on the words and perspective of mixed-race women and interrogated the significance of their mixed-racial heritage when examining their texts. By crafting narratives which addressed the hierarchies of colour and the existence of mixed-race Americans, their work challenged the notion of homogeneity within African-American communities, thus revealing a broader understanding of how these communities functioned during the early twentieth century. Their work also revealed that physically embodying the legacy of a mixed-race ancestry led to differing, but nonetheless important, experiences both within local African-American communities and the wider American society.

Alice Dunbar-Nelson and Georgia Douglas Johnson were born in the last decades of the nineteenth-century, 1875 and 1880 respectively, meaning that they witnessed the emergence of a turn-of-the-century black literary tradition which challenged dominant stereotypes surrounding black female, sexuality, domesticity and motherhood.[823] While Zora Neale Hurston and Anita Reynolds were born in 1891 and 1901 respectively, they similarly felt the forces of the shifts that Dunbar-Nelson and Johnson faced; and having lived through the opening decades of the twentieth century they all witnessed the racial violence, eugenicist rhetoric and cultural reconfigurations that characterised these years. Of particular importance is the fact that each of these women were active during the New Negro Renaissance, a time

[823] Feimster, *Southern Horrors,* p.165

when notions of race, gender, hybridity, and sexuality were being reconfigured. By exploring the years spanning the New Negro Renaissance through the eyes of mixed-race women, and placing their words in conversation with each other, this chapter offered a new perspective. Through the analysis of Anita Thompson Dickinson Reynolds, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, and Zora Neale Hurston's autobiographical writings, it was shown that some mixed-race women actively reacted and responded to the perceived psychological implications of their mixed-racial identity.

The experience of intraracial prejudice and colourism, for instance, was articulated in the plays, poems and diaries of every woman analysed within this study, indicating that it was a key issue at play during this time for light-skinned women of mixed-racial heritage. Hurston's play, *Color Struck,* addressed the existence of mixed-race bodies within African-American communities by highlighting the complex reality of colourism, and the differing ways it could be experienced.[824] Johnson's play *Blue Blood*, similarly critiqued the existence of colourism as well as the pervasive reality of sexual exploitation at the hands of white men, and the effects it can have on people of mixed-racial heritage, as did her later play and *Blue Eyed Black Boy*. Johnson's poetry, however, was most explicit in its exploration of mixed-race identity. Her poem 'The Octoroon,' employed the 'mulatta' figure to critique the societal frameworks which subjugated people, and particularly women, of colour in the United States, while 'The Riddle' explored the existence of "White men's children, in black men's skin."

It could be argued that the class or social scope of the women examined in this chapter presents a limitation. As urban elites living in north-eastern cities such as New York and Washington DC, the playwrights examined held middle-class positions as teachers and government workers.[825] Their characters also tended to be decidedly middle-class, and while many light-skinned and mixed-raced Americans did experience a better quality of life, for instance as members of the 'mulatto elite,' than their darker-skinned counterparts, their experience cannot be considered indicative of the experience of mixed-race women across the United States. Moreover, each of the women were acquainted, with Dunbar-Nelson and Hurston regular participants of the famous "Saturday Nighters" literary salon hosted in Georgia Douglas Johnson's front room. These gatherings, which would have excluded non-intellectuals, influenced the work of many African-American creatives in Washington DC,

[824] Hurston, *Colour Struck,* pp.89-102
[825] Stephens, *The Plays of Georgia Douglas Johnson: From the New Negro Renaissance to the Civil Rights Movement*, (Illinois, 2006), p.13

and it could be construed that Johnson Dunbar-Nelson and Hurston were exposed to the same line of thoughts, leading to shared understandings of miscegenation and mixed-racial identity. Indeed Dunbar-Nelson's contention in the essay 'Brass Ankles,' that light-skinned people stick together out of necessity appears to correlate to the fact that Johnson's literary salon mostly consisted of mixed-race writers.[826] Nonetheless, by examining the public and private testimony of women whose experiences spanned the United States, and even incorporated Transatlantic perspectives, this Chapter shed light on the ways in which mixed-race identity was navigated throughout the period.

Chapter Three then brought the thesis to an end by presenting two case studies, each focussed on the life of a biracial woman born to a white mother and a black father across two different time periods. Building on the testimonies examined in Chapter Two, this chapter adopted this analytical approach based on the theory that there would have been a marked difference between an individual knowing that interracial relations had taken place somewhere in their past, but being raised by two parents that identified as African-American, and the experience of being the direct result of a relationship between two people who identified as disparate racial groups. It chose to focus on the experience of women born to a white mother and a black father, because while all forms of interracial intimacy were derided throughout the period, the mere suggestion of intimacy between a white woman and a black man could provoke violent ramifications over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[827] Deemed 'sexually-vivacious' with a 'bestial appetite' for innocent white women, the spectre of the black male rapist haunted the cultural landscape of the Reconstruction South.

Despite evidence produced by anti-lynching activists such as Ida B. Wells which showed that only one-third of the black lynch-mob victims had been accused of rape, the "old threadbare lie" of the black rapist conquered the Southern racists' mind, and continued to justify extra-legal violence.[828] Much of this violence against black men had more to do with ensuring the supremacy of white patriarchy than the protection of white womanhood. The Introductory Chapter briefly examined two case studies of high-profile interracial marriages between a white woman and black man during the nineteenth and twentieth century. These examples demonstrated the ways in which relationships between black men and white women

[826] Dunbar-Nelson, 'Brass Ankles Speaks,' p.312; and Bower, *"Color Struck" Under the Gaze,* p.15
[827] Feimster, *Southern Horrors,*p.90; and Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies,* p.76
[828] Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, pp.90-92

were perceived, presented and challenged over the course of the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth century. Defamation of character was frequently cast on the black male involved, before the psychological stability or moral standing of the white partner was questioned. These examples provided an important insight into the context within which the product of interracial unions existed, and highlighted the distinctly American anxiety surrounding the idea of white women bearing a black man's child. Indeed, central to the concern that black men could undermine white male hegemony lay in the birth of mixed-race children.[829] Indeed, while the mixed-race children of black women followed the racial status of their mother, meaning that if their mother was enslaved they too would be a slave, the mixed-race children of white women were free.[830] In response, the turn of the century witnessed the emergence of 'black baby' fables. These tales often featured the transformation of a 'perfect' white baby into a black, and simultaneously demonic, creature. Such tales were continually recounted because of their ability to not only inspire terror in the minds of white women, but also allude to eugenicist research surrounding "reversion to type."[831]

The main focus of this final chapter surrounded an examination of the lives of Angelina Weld Grimké and Philippa Duke Schuyler. Each of these women were born to a white mother and a black father within the institution of marriage, and therefore would not have suffered the same taint of illegitimacy that so often effected the lives of biracial and mixed-race Americans. Despite their 'legitimacy' and the fact that they were born over fifty years apart, however, neither of them identified as biracial. Through an examination of family correspondence, private musings and creative productions, it was revealed that these women negotiated their racial identity in differing ways. While Grimké chose to identify as an African-American woman and fully engaged herself with the African-American intelligentsia in Washington DC, Schuyler instead distanced herself from both her white and black heritage by creating a new and 'exotic' identity and passing as named Felipa Monterro.[832]

A key element of this chapter built on Caroline A. Streeter's theory that age formed a crucial factor in the perception and representation of biracial women.[833] In particular, Streeter identifies the advent of maturity as central to the shift in perceptions of biracial women, as

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[829] Harris, *Exorcising Blackness,* p.97
[830] Daniel Sharfstein, *The Invisible Line*, p.49
[831] San Souci, *More Short and Shivery: Thirty Terrifying Tales*, pp.172-177 and p.211. Dawkins, 'Black Babies, White Hysteria,' p.167
[832] Streeter, *Tragic No More,* p.120
[833] Streeter, *Tragic No More,* pp.106-107

the development of adult sexuality made miscegenation inevitable.[834] Sexual maturity required women of black-white descent to become anchored in a single racial category which was, more often than not, 'Negro.' Through each case study, it was shown that as young children, both Grimké and Schuyler were deemed nonthreatening 'bridges' between the black and white races, but that the advent of their perceived maturity formed a significant catalyst to the major changes in both of their lives and subsequently influenced the negotiation of their biracial identities.

Grimké, for instance, was only seven years old when her mother Sarah returned her to her father Archibald, and relinquished all maternal responsibility. Although Angelina had not yet reached sexual maturity, her biracial heritage up to this point had been framed by her childhood innocence and her ability to defuse familial disapproval directed at her parents' interracial marriage. Despite her young age, Angelina's biracial identity seemingly manifested in a way that changed the course of her life, and inhibited her ability to mature as the biracial daughter of a white mother. A similar trajectory can be identified with Philippa Schuyler. As she transitioned from child prodigy to one of African-America's "most beautiful women," she lost the ability to symbolise the 'bridge.' Unable to occupy a space within the American public sphere which matched her understanding of her own biracial heritage, Philippa pursued a career outside the United States and refashioned herself as Felipa Monterro y Schuyler, a woman of Iberian heritage who could join 'white ethnics' or 'off-whites' in a middle area away from black and white.[835]

To conclude, this research has complicated existing historiography on African-American women by challenging interpretations that have failed to account for variations in racial heritage and skin tone, and provided a nuanced contribution to the field of critical mixed-race studies. In particular, it has shown that mixed-race women, whose bodies were a site over which racial, cultural and political ideologies were contested, sought to reclaim agency by writing themselves and their psychological being into existence.

At its core, this thesis has underscored the need to further consider the often overlooked nuances of race and identity during the early twentieth century. Moreover, it has shown that examining such nuances can reveal how concepts and hierarchies of race are understood in the late-twentieth and early twenty-first century. Indeed, the sexual exploitation

[834] *Ibid.*
[835] McNeil, *Sex and Race in the Black Atlantic,* pp.38-39

of enslaved black women at the hands of white men had a legacy which not only permeated the twentieth century, but continues to effect the lives of African-Americans today. In June 2020, as the Black Lives Matter movement gained momentum across the world, Caroline Randall Williams wrote a powerful piece in the *New York Times*, in response to mainstream debates about the place of Confederate statues across the United States. As a black Southern woman with "No. Voluntary. Whiteness" in her heritage, Williams powerfully contends that her body is a living monument, and a relic of slavery, the Old South and Jim Crow.[836] The existence of her light brown "rape-colored skin" provides a tangible truth to those that deny plantation rape, and insist that the Old South and Confederate cause be remembered through the frame of honour and gentility.[837] By centring her body within the debate, Williams arguably engaged in what Brittney Cooper termed "embodied discourse," and continued the intellectual rhetoric that began with the women's club movement of the 1890s through to 2020. That such debates permeate this thesis further highlights the significance that this research has in providing a valuable and relevant context to the articulation and understanding of race during the twenty-first century. With that in mind, this thesis therefore makes an important contribution to the history of African-American and mixed-race women in the United States.

[836] Carolina Randall Williams, *New York Times*, June 26, 2020.
https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/26/opinion/confederate-monuments-racism.html
[837] Carolina Randall Williams, *New York Times*, June 26, 2020.
https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/26/opinion/confederate-monuments-racism.html

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