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Vexed Alliances:
Asian American Mixed Race Representation

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This dissertation is dedicated
to my children, from whom I have learned the best lessons.
With love, always.

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Vexed Alliances:
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Nearly twenty years have passed since the possibility of identifying as more than one race was made possible on the 2000 U.S. census. Much of the national discourse around the “browning of America”—the idea that the United States was rapidly becoming a minority-majority nation—has been celebratory; the mixed race subject, it seems, has left tragedy behind to become a new sign of national inclusion. Scholars of mixed race studies, however, have raised concerns over how such celebratory treatment eclipses a long and often troubling history of mixed race in the United States: tolerated under slavery and colonialism but elsewhere legally and socially proscribed. Through an analysis of representations of mixed race in Asian American literature, this project considers

how centering on mixed race uniquely illuminates the contours of the suppressed white monoracial identification that underwrites dominant American culture.

Focusing specifically on representations of Asian American mixed race allows for a more nuanced discussion of the historical, cultural, and political nuances of mixed race that emerge when examined in light of a particular minority group.

The first chapter considers how Diana Chang's novel *The Frontiers of Love* deploys the emerging subjectivities of her central mixed race characters to expose classic psychoanalysis' assumption of a monoracial family. Focusing on Aimee Liu's *Face*, the second chapter discusses the ambivalence with which monoracial groups view mixed race subject, whose allegiance is understood as suspect. The third chapter examines how Chang-Rae Lee's *Native Speaker* offers a complex critique of mixed race as a form of biological assimilation. Grappling with the frontier myth as it relates to mixed race subjectivity, the fourth chapter contemplates the role that American expansionist narratives have played in the construction of mixed race identity as revealed in John Yau's "Hawaiian Cowboy" and Nina Revoyr's *Wingshooters*.

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Introduction

It has been nearly twenty years since mixed race advocacy groups in the United States successfully secured the inclusion of racially mixed people on the 2000 census by way of allowing respondents to check more than one racial identity. In the years leading up to the change, the national discourse regarding the “browning of America”—the notion that the United States would soon become a majority minority nation—was generally celebratory. *Time* magazine digitally created the image of a beautiful mixed race woman to place on the cover of their special edition “The New Face of America” in 1993. It seemed that the mixed race subject had left tragedy behind and ascended to the seat of the universal.

Scholars of mixed race studies, however, have long been aware of a more troubling history of race mixing in the United States despite its idealization at the end of the twentieth century. Most prominent among such scholars is Ranier Spencer who in *Challenging Multiracial Identity*, his second book on the subject of mixed race, proclaims his project to be a “completely unapologetic polemic against the notion of US black/white multiracial identity, particularly what is known as first-generation identity, and against published work to date that supports it” (4). Spencer was an early opponent to the articulation of mixed race as an identificatory category and he touches upon all the major objections at some point across the span of his three books and various articles on the subject. Although Spencer’s discussion centers on “black/white multiracial

identity;” many of the concerns he expresses, as I will demonstrate, have implications for multiracial identity more broadly.

At the heart of Spencer’s critique of mixed race identity is what he sees as the problematic reification of biological notions of race implicit in the very concept of race mixing. Even when invoking notions of the social construction of race, Spencer claims, proponents of multiracial identity ultimately succumb to the old, oppressive biological racial paradigm “embraced now as a social construction” which is “precisely the same paradigm under a new name” (15). It is this logic that leads him elsewhere to argue, “The struggle against racism must continue, but we must at the same time understand that the foundation of racism, the race construct, must be rejected as well” (*Spurious Issues*, 47). For Spencer, the creation of new multiracial identities does not “reject the race construct” but only undergirds racial paradigms that preserve whiteness as racial purity, allowing racism to persist.

Spencer asserts the conceptualization of a child as “multiracial” or “biracial” produced from the union of a black parent and a white parent hinges upon the erasure of the black parent’s heterogeneous background. According to Spencer, the purported newness of mixed race does indeed threaten to erase the actual racial and cultural heterogeneity of African Americans in a way that is impoverishing (87). Other scholars have noted a similar erasure with regard to different mixed race groups. Discussing the fetishization of hybridity as it relates to Asian American multiracial subjects, David Palumbo-Lui writes, “[I]t was

popularized by the eugenics movement [. . .], and the proliferation of anti-miscegenation laws (many still on the books) based on a violent aversion to the idea of hybridity” (qtd. in Santa Ana, 20). For Palumbo-Liu, the celebration of hybridity common to postmodern thinking functions to cover the traumatic history of how hybridity in the form of race mixing has been conceived of as a scourge to the progress of humankind. Nonetheless, while the potential of mixed race identity to be idealized in a manner that extirpates the lived history of racially mixed people in the United States is a genuine concern, Spencer’s contention that the modern construction of mixed race identity *requires* such an erasure reflects a narrow understanding of how mixed race might be constructed.

Spencer’s perspective is heavily informed by Joel Williamson’s *New People*, which Spencer uses to call into question the newness of mixed race in the United States. It is Williamson’s project is to trace the history of racially mixed African Americans and their descendants. Prior to the Civil War period and the increasing adaptation of the notion of hypodescent, more commonly known as the one-drop rule, “mulatto” people were treated largely as a separate group, neither black nor white, according to Williamson. Differing regions, in fact, handled the question of mulattoes in varied ways. For example, just what constituted blackness in the Chesapeake Colonies remained in flux until after the Revolution when Virginia constructed the definition of whiteness as “free people with anything less than one-fourth of black blood” (13). Such definitions, though, seemed to produce even greater contradictions:

This rather generous fraction classed as white some people who were clearly Negro. Thus in Virginia there were some people who were significantly black, visibly black, and known to be black, but by the law of the land and the ruling of the courts had the privileges of whites. (15)

These sorts of discrepancies between visual markers and legal definitions of race, along with other differences in the upper and lower South regarding the status of mulattoes, set the stage for the adoption of the one-drop rule, which would equate whiteness with racial purity. In the 20th century, hypodescent would be codified in some states, yet even the logic of hypodescent did not foreclose the possibilities of other racial constructions by racially mixed African Americans. Williamson suggests that while racially mixed writers of the Harlem Renaissance increasingly identified with black culture as a result of a hardening of the color line, many considered themselves “brown” or something other than either black or white (192). In Williamson’s account, the one-drop rule (and its goal of reifying black and white as mutually exclusive racial categories) does little to explain the complex maze of the lived experiences and cultural productions of racially mixed African Americans in the United States.

It is this failure of the one-drop rule to address the complexity of African American experience in the United States paired with the manner in which he sees conceptions of mixed race as perpetuating the myth of the monoraciality and cultural uniformity of African Americans that prompts Spencer’s rejection of

the idea of mixed race. Nonetheless, Spencer's argument neglects to engage with how African American racial identity is understood in the larger culture at the moment when mixed race identity emerges (or perhaps more properly, re-emerges) at the end of the twentieth century. He does not consider the potential articulations mixed race might offer as an intervention in prevailing contemporaneous notions of race.

Spencer does effectively reference the historical racial and cultural heterogeneity of African Americans to challenge the newness of mixed race. But it is fair to say that the logic of hypodescent was firmly entrenched in mainstream American thinking such that a black person with a family history of racial mixing was then, and remains so today, generally understood as black. In other words, the problematic erasure of heterogeneity cannot simply be traced to the increasing numbers of people identifying as racially mixed even if an uncritical deployment of the notion of mixed race perpetuates the erasure. Furthermore, given that the wider culture was already taking note of the "browning" of America and idealizing mixed race, one could readily argue that participation in the construction of mixed race by the people the term is meant to describe is a crucial move in counteracting the narratives to which Spencer objects.

In fact, this project's goal is in part to respond to the prevailing popular narratives about mixed race that have circulated in recent years, but unlike Spencer, I do not see discounting all constructions of mixed race subjectivity as a necessary part of such a project. The articulation of mixed race identity by

minority groups who identify as such has, in my mind, augmented the possibilities of reclaiming histories that had largely been obscured in the mainstream American imagination. Undoubtedly, there have been proponents of the mixed race movement who suggest that mixed race identity is a move toward a “post-race” world, especially in the movement’s nascent stages. But a reclamation of the past has also been a part of the mixed race movement since its inception--even within texts that seem to subscribe to a “post-racial” view of mixed race. One essay, “Color Fades Over Time” by Brunetta Wolfman is found in one of the earliest anthologies on the subject, *American Mixed Race* (1995), and describes a long family history of interracial relationships and intercultural exchanges leading to the author’s multiracial grandchildren. In her narrative, Wolfman situates her grandchildren’s story as continuous with the ancestors that preceded them--not as representatives of a “new people.”

What is new about her grandchildren is that they are identified as multiracial, a possibility that, according to Wolfman, was not afforded to earlier generations. “Racial identity,” she writes, “has always been that of the colored, Negro, black, African-American group until the children of the sixth generation” (22). In other words, multiraciality is not cast as new but the ability to lay claim to multiracial identity within the wider culture is. Wolfman does understand the “new autonomy” permitted under the mixed race identificatory category as a mechanism for “discard[ing] old arbitrary racial labels” previously used in the United States (23). Yet this idealization of a deracinated nation, however

problematic, does not flow from a naiveté regarding the history of racially mixed Americans.

As with any racial construct, there is a risk that the notion of mixed race may be wielded in protection of the status quo, as has been witnessed in the historical treatment of mulattoes in the United States and “Coloured” people in South Africa. Indeed, mixed race people have even been termed “neo-mulattoes” by one critic (Horton 118). Briefly stated, there is nothing inherently progressive about the idea of mixed race. But I hope to participate in the construction of a notion of mixed race that simultaneously respects the contemporary experiences of mixed race subjects, acknowledges the history of race mixing in the United States, and contests the dominant narratives that work to elide these preceding narratives.

One complicating issue in doing this type of work lies in the fact that the notion of mixed race encompasses the histories of so many diverse groups. In *Making Multiracials*, Kimberly McClain DaCosta, a social scientist, argues, “[T]here is no group ‘history’ or culture that all mixed race people share” (7). To some degree, DaCosta is correct. While the actual numbers of people who identify as mixed race remain smaller than any monoracial group in the United States, the conceptual expansiveness of the term mixed race presents the challenge of how to speak with any specificity about its meaning. This difficulty, along with the fact that mixed race studies is an emergent discipline focusing on an emergent identity, may help explain why a good deal of the discourse around

mixed race focuses on personal narrative and questions of subjectivity. Despite the intimation that such a question is primarily one of personal exploration and idiosyncratic expression (and there are many mixed race narratives that treat the question thusly), a recent collection *Philosophy and the Mixed Race Experience* asserts “self-ascription cannot be the final word on who we are” (xiv). While the collection foregrounds mixed race experience and acknowledges its multiplicity, it resists the temptation to view mixed race through the lens of hyper-individuality.

Other scholars of mixed race have taken a broader view, considering the implication of mixed race for existing racial structures. In the introduction of a collection of essays focused on mixed race and racial justice, editor David Brunsma issues a “new call,” suggesting that multiracial criticism must move away from the assumption that multiraciality is necessarily “for the ‘better.’” Instead, he argues, it “desperately needs to be self-critical, to be willing to adopt new lenses with which to view the phenomena at hand” (5). Given the susceptibility of mixed race to be assimilated into idyllic depictions of American inclusion, Brunsma is correct to call for a more critical engagement with the significance of mixed race, and I take a similar tack.

The multiracial movement seems to be at least partially motivated by a desire to square kinship and multiraciality within the consciousness of the larger culture. In her research, Da Costa notes how racially mixed people frequently feel that choosing a single racial category is to signify allegiance with one parent over the other. She writes, “Many of the people involved in multiracial

organizations view their activism as an expression of family loyalty” (18). “Their involvement in multiracial organizations,” she continues, “was designed to make visible relationships that are often hidden to others--those between parents and children who appear racially different.” Ultimately, Da Costa surmises, the “multiracial movement is as much about family as race.” Because mixed race people, as Da Costa notes, often appear to be racially different from their parents, there is a constant need to justify familial ties.

To some degree, a desire to resist this demand for justification underwrites my project. In this light, I must quibble with the Da Costa’s assertion mentioned earlier in which she contends there is no shared “‘history’ or culture” with regards to mixed race people. The truth is that much commonality can be found in a shared exclusion from the “normal” and a sense of the illegitimacy of the multiracial family--even when those families were formed well after the famous *Loving V. State of Virginia* ruling which ensured their legal status. As important as Brunsmas’s call to “adopt a new lens” through which to view mixed race is, equally important is the need to adopt a lens through which to interrogate the assumptive normativity of monoraciality, especially the monoracial family, within the imagination of the United States. Otherwise stated, we must investigate the mechanisms through which the ideal subject is understood to descend from a monoracially white heterosexual family.

To this end, each of the four chapters included here, which I will later describe in greater detail, incorporates some consideration of how centering on

mixed race illuminates the contours of the suppressed white monoracial identification that underwrites dominant American culture. By focusing specifically on representations of Asian American mixed race, this project is able to attend more readily to the historical, cultural, and political nuances of mixed race when viewed in relation to a specific minority group. Nonetheless, any discussion of mixed race must keep an eye toward a broader conceptualizations of mixed race because mainstream American culture vacillates between casting mixed race as a single category of racial identity and differentiating mixed race subjects according to the monoracial groups with which they are most closely identified.

In my first chapter, “Mixed Race ‘Citizens for an Expanding Century’: The Connivance of Psychoanalysis and Kinship in Diana Chang’s *Frontiers of Love*,” I focus on how Diana Chang’s novel *The Frontiers of Love* envisions the role of mixed race subjects in challenging racist thinking. In my discussion, I analyze how the text engages with classic psychoanalytic theories of subject formation, using scholars such as Jean Walton to illuminate how race underwrites the Oedipal model. Building on that argument, I discuss the Oedipal model’s assumption of a monoracial family to demonstrate how such an assumption makes it impossible for the mixed race subjects in Chang’s text to achieve subjecthood within the framework of the psychoanalytic model. As a result, *Frontiers of Love* calls into question the usefulness of the psychoanalytic model in understanding mixed race subjectivity.

In the second chapter, “‘But You Can’t Make Substitutions for Parents’: Mixed Race Subjects and the Question of Allegiance,” I discuss Aimee Liu’s *Face*. Similar to *Frontiers of Love*, *Face* deals with the implications of interracial marriage, but the novel focuses on the ambivalence with which mixed race subjectivity is treated by monoracial groups. The novel allows for a discussion of important late-twentieth-century ideological tensions underpinning the uncertainty regarding mixed race. As the numbers of racially mixed people in the United States grew, the question of whether mixed race identification would represent a more nuanced minority identification or whether it would be subsumed as a new category of whiteness became especially salient. These uncertainties circulate around the central character, Maibelle, as she navigates her own tragic past and comes to realize how understanding her history requires attention to larger issues of race and mixed race.

“Blood Brothers: Social Contract Theory, Mixed Race, and Fraternal Democracy in Chang-Rae Lee’s *Native Speaker*,” the third chapter, examines Chang Rae Lee’s *Native Speaker*, a novel offering a complex critique of mixed race as a form of biological assimilation. The novel follows Henry Park, a Korean American corporate spy, as he works to make sense of the death of his young son Mitt in a freak accident. Mitt, the sole mixed race character in the text, is conspicuously absent for the majority of the novel, suggesting that the assimilation of mixed race as a form of whiteness enacts an erasure akin to death. In my analysis, I employ the work of political theorist Carol Pateman,

whose feminist reconsideration of the social contract exposes how it is preceded by the marriage contract. Understood as an extension of the “natural” subordination of woman to man, the marriage contract persists as an understood, unspoken prerequisite for women (wives) who are thus registered as necessarily second-class citizens by virtue of their subordination to men (husbands). In a mixed race family, particularly one in which the father is non-white, the conditions which ought to ensure his patriarchal authority (the subordination of a woman) are never fully enacted in this system insofar as racial difference poses a challenge to his patriarchal authority. In other words, the marriage contract is implicitly raced in such a manner that the mixed race subject is delegitimized as a participant in the social contract.

The fourth chapter, “The Frontier Myth and the Making of Asian American Mixed Race,” contextualizes the construction of mixed race in the United States within the logic of expansionism. In it, I examine how mixed race identity has been idealized as the subject position that ought most to be “at home” in the frontier, a space that is associated with endless possibility in the national imagination. The sense of the mixed race subject as pioneering the way toward a progressive racial future, I argue, is used at times by mixed race writers to resist pejorative constructions of mixed race and at is deployed at other times as a cover for conservative racial attitudes. In tracing the idea of the mixed race pioneer, I return to Diana Chang’s *Frontiers of Love* to reflect upon her use of the frontier to mixed race’s association with hybrid degeneracy. John Yau’s

“Hawaiian Cowboys” is also addressed in this chapter for the manner in which it enables a critique of how mixed race identity in Hawaii was celebrated in order to mollify concerns over the incorporation of the first majority minority state into the union. A similar co-optation of mixed race is evidenced in the series *Kung Fu*, which recasts the frontier as the home of recalcitrant white racism that must be corrected by nonwhite racial pioneers who enact a severely circumscribed form of passive racial politics. Lastly, I focus on Nina Revoyr’s *Wingshooters* to consider how the novel interrogates the responsibility placed on these racial pioneers to do the work of ensuring the promise of a more egalitarian democratic society.

As discussed earlier, it is only through an effacement of the racial histories of mixed race subjects that later representations have been able to cast mixed race people as idealized American subjects. My project seeks to lay claim to those histories, and while remaining respectful of the unique lived experiences of mixed race individuals, focus more broadly on the way in which the mixed race subject, as a subject from an “improper” family, is represented to be unable to fully possess political membership.

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Chapter 1

Mixed Race “Citizens for an Expanding Century”: The Connivance of Psychoanalysis and Kinship in Diana Chang’s *Frontiers of Love*

Diana Chang’s novel *The Frontier’s of Love*, frequently identified as the first Chinese American novel, is situated in Shanghai at the end of World War II and centers on three mixed-race characters, Sylvia, Feng, and Mimi. The identities of *Frontiers*’ mixed-race subjects mirror the characterization of the racially and culturally mixed city of Shanghai throughout the novel. On the one hand, Shanghai serves as a reminder of Western colonial violence in China. The dissection of Shanghai into British and French concessions with a separate Chinese area effectively created a Chinatown on Chinese soil, fashioning a quasi-colonial relationship between Westerners and the Chinese inhabitants of the city. But on the other hand, Shanghai represents a cosmopolitan city seemingly poised to lead China into the future. Just as the city signifies in contradictory ways, the novel similarly raises the question of whether mixed race subjects will remain undeniably marked by the history of colonialism that structures their racialization or whether they will become, as one character idealistically imagines, “citizens for an expanding century,” ideal subjects for a new egalitarian social order (245).

In the brief discussion of *Frontiers of Love* that is part of the well-known introduction to the anthology *AlIIEEEEEE!*, Chin and his fellow editors focus on identity formation, envisioning the main characters as metaphorical constructs for

subjects who straddle two cultures. “Diana Chang in her protagonists of mixed blood and their single-blooded parents,” they argue, “provides us with a logical dramatic metaphor for the conflict of cultures” (ix). According to Chin et al., Sylvia “cannot choose between her parents or identify her blood as one thing or the other” which exposes the “question of choice” to be “a phony one imposed on her by outside forces” (ix-x). Although the *AlIIIEEEEE!* preface offers the beginnings of a potentially viable analysis, Chang—though not directly in response to that analysis—nonetheless discounts interpretations of the mixed-race characters as metaphors for cultural difference in the United States. She offers, “When *Frontiers* came out, it was picked up by the emerging ethnic movement as a book about ethnicity in this country,” contending that such a reading “was a total misrepresentation—it wasn’t—it was about people of mixed blood living in China, with conflicts in culture, emotions, values, and the rest of it because of their parents” (Ling, 32). Chang gestures toward foreclosing the possibility of the metaphorical reading proposed by Chin et al. Setting aside the notion of authorial intent, I would like to highlight the importance Chang’s comments place on interiority, notions such as family or “their parents,” as the primary source of the mixed race subject’s “conflicts in culture, emotion, values” as opposed to the “outside forces” Chin indicates are “imposed on” them. The novel, like Chang’s statement above, invites the reader to understand the larger structures of colonialism and racism by first delving inward.

Other discussions have taken note of this centripetal movement in the novel, viewing it as signaling the unusual difficulty of the mixed race subject to achieve full subjecthood. Sandra Baringer, for example, provides an interesting discussion of the “problem of masochism,” which she contends “stems from the problem of selfhood for the mixed race characters” (108). Also focusing on this difficulty, Amy Ling issues the following assertion:

The question of identity for the Eurasian is even more complex an issue than for the hyphenated person. The latter’s conflict is one of cultures, a new one overlaid onto the old; however, for a Eurasian, the characteristics of both races are distinctive and distinguishable but inseparable within herself. (71)

For Ling, the racially mixed subject faces a greater challenge in formulating identity than does “hyphenated” monoracial subject who bridges two cultures.

This notion that the mixed race subject confronts uncustomary obstacles in forging an identity is a familiar theme in discussions of mixed race. Such thinking is evidenced in sociologist Robert Park’s well-known “marginal man” theory, which suggested unavoidable psychological difficulty for those who exist betwixt and between two cultures. The biological sciences’ version of this idea is “hybrid degeneracy”--the flip side of the construction of racially mixed people as possessing unusual talents or “hybrid vigor.” These ideas have further shaped mixed race studies. Indeed, as one writer put it, much of early mixed race studies sought to answer the “perennial question” of “Who Am I?” (Brunsma, 2).

Unsurprisingly, *Frontiers*' central characters, Sylvia, Mimi and Feng, might initially be said to be incomplete subjects or, to employ psychoanalytic terminology, subjects with insufficiently developed egos. Given the prevailing attitudes about mixed race people, it would be tempting to interpret such permeable ego boundaries as a mark of serious deficiency and to understand the eventual demise or near demise of two of the novel's central racially mixed characters, Mimi and Feng, as a pejorative construction of incomplete subject formation cast as an ailment that needs curing. But in the process of looking inward, the novel performs a crucial move of resisting the commonplace tendency to read any psychological difficulty in a mixed-race person as the de facto result of their liminality such that being mixed race problematically becomes synonymous with pathology. It is this aspect of Chang's novel, its powerful forward-looking interrogation of the assumptive normativity of monoraciality, especially the monoracial family, that has not yet been fully explored in other treatments of the text.

In order to understand how *Frontiers* engages the question of identity formation for the mixed race subject, we must pay careful attention to its employment of classic psychoanalytic theories. Chang's text is heavily informed by psychoanalytic theories of development; in fact, the characters in the novel discuss Freud as they gather together to commiserate over the trouble of Japanese occupation (13). With exception of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, the intersection of psychoanalysis and critical race theory has been of later

interest in academia, but scholars such as Jean Walton have demonstrated how race has been a structuring if repressed force in psychoanalysis from its inception. Indeed, Bronislaw Malinowski offered an earlier critique of psychoanalysis' ethnocentrism in his *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (1927) but met with resistance because, Walton claims, "to challenge the universality of the Oedipus conflict was to threaten the psychoanalytic enterprise at its very foundations" (3). Walton continues to argue of classical psychoanalysis, "racial subtext informs this developmental model, in which maturity also implies the full (or again, classically flawed) assumption of a heterosexualized, raced adulthood" (5). Because racial difference is often understood as belonging to the public domain while sexual difference is understood as belonging to the private domain, much psychoanalytic criticism casts racial difference as secondary to presumptively foundational sexual difference. Sexual difference precedes racial difference in classic psychoanalytic logic as it is sexual difference that structures the family; race is encountered in one's larger social interactions outside of the normative racially homogenous family. Nonetheless, while I will return to this debate later, *The Frontiers of Love* is able to suspend this conflict over whether race or sex should be given primacy in the formation of the subject by considering that which seems to be outside the realm of possibility for many scholars: the racially mixed family. In turning our attention to the racially mixed family, the novel illustrates the idea that—just as the family is not necessarily "private—race is not necessarily "public" (Walton,

13). In Chang's text, racially mixed families, organized under racist/colonial logic as much as a sex/gender regime, replace the racially homogenous nuclear family assumed by classic psychoanalysis. As such, the text places race undeniably at the site of the emergence of the subject, troubling traditional psychoanalytic models of development, which assume a monoracial family and thereby the primacy of foundational sexual difference.

The Oedipal Trap

Given the novel's apparent investment in Freudian psychoanalysis, it would be tempting to read the novel straightforwardly in a classic psychoanalytic light. For example, Feng Huang, the novel's central male figure, could most easily be read in the lens of classic male-oriented psychoanalytic processes of development. Feng's failure to achieve wholeness plays itself out in the familiar form of the Oedipal drama that Feng, despite his age of twenty-six, has yet to resolve. The fact that Feng, "a Eurasian who could never reconcile himself to being one," remains caught in the Oedipal stage long past the period in which he should have passed through it would in itself be relatively unremarkable if we were to examine Feng's Oedipal complex solely in light of gender, as traditional psychoanalysis would have us do (9). In such a traditional reading, Feng's unresolved Oedipal complex could be attributed to his abandonment by his father, which prevented introduction of the father's law by removing the source of the castration threat that would have required the repression of the Oedipal complex, so the story goes. Being abandoned by his father did have its effects on

Feng. But by viewing the novel through the interpretive grid of critical race theory, we get another picture of the psychic web in which Feng is caught, a gossamer where the strands of race, nation and gender are interwoven. Not only does race exacerbate Feng's unresolved Oedipal complex but it also challenges the way that classical psychoanalysis formulates the complex itself. Indeed, in Feng's case, racial and cultural differences transform the processes that are supposed to encourage the completion of the Oedipal stage into processes that weave him endlessly into new Oedipal dramas.

Feng's relationship to his mother cannot be thoroughly explained without recourse to race. His mother, Audrey, is represented to be at best pathetic, virtually unable to care for herself without Feng's continual support. Yet despite her apparent weakness and dependency, Feng finds her incredibly threatening. We learn that Audrey's voice could "reduce his resolve to water that sloshed back and forth, up and down, in his room which now seemed to be a bright cell" (22). Feng's mother causes him to wither miserably, reducing him to an infantile state as he "sloshe[s] back and forth" fetus-like in the "cell" of his room. Reducing his "resolve to water," Audrey's very voice has a castrating effect on Feng. And, of course, women in general for Freud induce castration anxiety. But Audrey, for all her desperateness, is infused with a notable power. Notice Feng's telling description of her:

Her hair was fine and still the brilliant red that had attracted his father. It was dressed in a high and loosely piled pompadour that

always was on its way down. It descended with little sighs and ended in little wisps about her face. Fine gold hairpins jutted out precariously from behind an ear, hanging by a single hair; they sat on her shoulders, they caught in her lace bodices; they left a trail wherever she had been. (22)

Feng is anxious about the threat posed by his mother, booby-trapped with jutting gold hairpins. What is remarkable about this description is the contrast between Audrey's seeming feminine delicacy and her marked dangerousness.

While such apparently incongruent characterizations of the mother figure are certainly not without precedent in classic psychoanalysis, this particular characterization relates the ambivalence embedded in colonial relationships, where colonizing forces are both violent and benevolent, threatening and nurturing—what one character in the novel calls a “cruel act” of mixing “progress with exploitation” (40). We can further understand this description of Audrey as signaling a particularly colonial (rather than simply maternal) ambivalence by witnessing its similarity to the description of the diffuse power of colonials. The novel offers the following telling description: “Colonialism was still a perfume behind their ears, still the wicks of their unconscious spirits. They moved among the Chinese and left blondness in their wakes, even when they were brunettes” (86). Much like other colonials who leave “blondness in their wakes,” Audrey possesses a diffuse power signified in the trail of hairpins she leaves behind. And part and parcel of such a privilege lies in colonials’ unconsciousness access to it.

Western dominance is akin to a perfume emanating from the “wicks of their unconscious spirits”; in other words, it is a domination that has become naturalized; it has been integrated into the very core, the unconscious, of the subject.

Importantly, phallic power adheres to Audrey without her summoning it or seeming to be able to control it. In Riviere’s famous analysis, a woman reveals her possession of the phallus through a demonstration excellence in a typically masculine realm, say, for example, by illustrating her intellectual prowess. Audrey, though, by no means appears to fit such a model. She thus serves as an important figure in illustrating the complex relationship between gender, race and culture; as a woman she is feminine, while as a white English colonial in Shanghai, she represents a racial and cultural power, and in that sense, possesses the phallus. To turn again to Riviere’s essay, a woman who is in possession of the phallus may, by donning the mask of femininity, “ward off the anxiety which would ensue on account of the reprisals she anticipated from the father-figures” (37). The theatrical, even melodramatic quality of Audrey’s of femininity would certainly testify to such a masking. But Audrey’s phallic power, unlike the women in Riviere’s analysis, is diffuse, emanating from her almost radioactively. Racial and national privilege, thus, is often--though certainly not always--unconsciously deployed; indeed, it is paradoxically most salient when least apparent.

Audrey further signals the danger of maternal envelopment for Feng. Even his mother's room is characterized by a suffocating femininity. Feng "felt he would have to climb out of her room" or else "he would be sucked in by the lace and the frills, the bejeweled room of her femininity" (26). Feng's overripe entanglement with his mother and consequent fear of feminine encroachment are again made all the more gripping by way of the colonial relationship between Shanghai and the West. Audrey's section of the house is not only characterized by an intoxicating femininity, but also, significantly, by its Englishness. Feng describes his home as an "Englishwoman's house, dark as an Elizabethan tavern, the walls lined with a somber wood" (22). Feng's mother's femininity and Englishness perpetually threaten to absorb him. His masculinity is doubly besieged by his inability to differentiate from his mother. On the one hand, to identify with English culture would be to identify with a "masculine" western colonial power and would entail a necessary repression of any identification with the feminized East. But on the other hand, such an identification would also be an identification with his British mother, which, according to classic psychoanalysis, must be overcome for the male child to pass through the Oedipal stage. As such, there is no clear path to traditional masculinity for Feng; he feels his masculinity and his Chinese cultural identity are interlocked and thereby both perpetually at risk.

Fretting over being tainted by Englishness, Feng works toward staving off westernization. This effort prompts him to join covert communist forces seeking

in part to rid China of foreign powers. We witness in the novel Feng's attempts to achieve masculine individuation through cultural purity, a notable example being his changing his name from his given English name "Farthington" to the Chinese name "Feng," which significantly has an overtly phallic significance in English. In fact, we can read Feng's devotion to communism in light of his need to differentiate from his parents. Such differentiation is necessary to the establishment of "higher social units" that Freud describes in the following passage: "Society must defend itself against the danger that the interests which it needs for the establishment of higher social units may be swallowed up by the family; and for this reason, it seeks by all possible means to loosen their connection with their family—a connection which, in their childhood, is the only important one." (290). It is of particular importance that adolescent boys, as opposed to girls, separate from their families according to Freud because this "detachment from parental authority" is "important for the progress of civilization" (291). And Feng does indeed view his actions for the communists as signifying his individuation from his parents. In joining the communists, he feels he "had left his parents behind" and undergone a transformation:

He had carved himself out of the dead tree of their lives—he had been able to do it the moment he had decided to leave his state of passivity. The day he had committed himself (it had seemed sudden, but he realized it had actually taken years), it was as though he had met himself coming around the corner. His

dividedness had met and from then on had walked down the street
in one body. (101-2)

In aligning himself with Shanghai communists, Feng aims at individuating from his parents by adhering to an ideology he believes to be progressive and, perhaps more importantly, is distinct from his parents' worldview. Feng thusly experiences a momentary sense of unity; he is no longer divided between East and West but is finally "in one body."

Just as the communist movement sought to rid China of foreign powers, Feng attaches himself to the movement in part to carve out a masculine identity defined by cultural purity. Accordingly, Feng identifies a substitute father among the communist operators in the form of Tang, one of the local leaders. Feng's attempts at masculine individuation via an affiliation with communism and identification with a cultural patriarch are nonetheless upended when Tang proves to be a "disapproving 'father'" (220). Tang causes Feng to "feel less Chinese than he was" so that what appears to be a potentially successful means of individuation proves yet another failure (29). In light of Feng's racial and cultural heterogeneity, which marks him as "less Chinese," Feng is made to feel incomplete, once again castrated.

Clearly, Feng is unable to establish a viable masculine identity via his British mother Audrey or his substitute Chinese father Tang. Of course, according to classic psychoanalysis, the completion of the Oedipal stage should occur within the triadic family unit. The male child is supposed to move from a

contentious relationship with the father to an identification with the father's desire for a woman so that the child wants to become a father in his own right rather than take his father's place with his mother. But within Feng's logic of cultural purity, such an identification with his biological father would neither resolve his Oedipal complex nor launch him into normative heterosexual masculinity. For example, recall that he describes his mother's hair as being "still the brilliant red that had attracted his father" (22) He is able at one point to see his mother as his father would see her—thus identifying with his father and his father's desire for a woman—but this is not a simple accession to the throne of masculinity insofar as his mother is white, a representative of the West. If we are to understand the Oedipal dynamic in the context of the triad that composes Feng's family, we must note that his father's desire is not simply the desire for a woman but, more specifically, the desire for a white British woman. Under colonial logic, where the West is cast as masculine and the East as feminine, Feng would thereby be simultaneously made masculine and emasculated in an identification with his father. In fact, his father's desire for his mother can be seen, certainly from Feng's nationalistic perspective, as a desire for white masculinity. The process that according to classic psychoanalysis ought to prompt the resolution of Feng's Oedipal crisis and launch him into normative heterosexual masculinity actually fosters unsanctioned, cross-racial homosocial desire and initiates yet another Oedipal cycle. Placing racial difference within the triadic family unit, normally the proprietary site of sexual difference as foundational difference, *Frontiers of Love*

illustrates the complicating effects of the racially mixed family on the psychoanalytic model.

I now turn my attention to an aspect of *Frontiers* that I have yet to comment upon but can scarcely leave untouched in a reading of a novel so heavily invested in psychoanalysis such as this one. Feng's relationship with his mother is highly charged with erotic energy. Given Feng's unresolved Oedipal complex, it is unsurprising that we see the incest taboo heavily at play in the portion of the narrative in which Feng's perspective dominates. For example, Feng believes that his mother is constantly attempting to lure him to her room. "Cunningly, she contrived to make him visit her rooms" (27), yet when caught in such contrivances, she coquettishly pleads, "'I'm naughty' [. . .] 'I'm sorry I'm naughty. Forgive me Feng.'" (26). In addition to being caught in the midst of an unresolved Oedipal conflict, Feng, by virtue of being mixed race, is already "tainted" by the history of his parents' own transgression of social norms, the miscegenation taboo or the rule of endogamy.

In her attempt to bridge psychoanalysis and critical race theory, Walton notes the centrality of the incest prohibition in both psychoanalytic accounts of the emergence of the subject and anthropological accounts of the emergence of human society. She continues to argue that kinship is dually manifested through the incest prohibition's demand for exogamy and a degree of endogamy or "the imperative to marry within a given social group" (10). In a somewhat strained effort to downplay the significance of endogamy, Levi-Strauss tells us "true

endogamy is merely the refusal to recognize the possibility of marriage beyond the limits of the human community” (46) We know, of course, that functionally the idea of endogamy has been used to police boundaries much nearer than those of that demarcate humankind. Nonetheless, it is thus that Levi-Strauss argues exogamy, not endogamy, is the chief organizing rule insofar as those who one cannot marry are never even considered as potential partners because “an essential characteristic of man disappears outside the limits of the group” (46). Just as it is through the exogamous exchange of women that subjects are gendered, Walton argues “through the racially defined endogamous exchange of women, kinship is also the means by which subjects are ‘raced’” (10). And this process of racialization also delimits who bears the “essential characteristic of man,” or, in other words, can be counted as fully human.

The incest taboo underwriting the Oedipal complex and the concomitant demand for exogamy require kinship boundaries to remain permeable (i.e., one must go to some degree “outside” to marry), but this permeability is circumscribed by the less frequently discussed miscegenation taboo. In colonial contexts such as mid-century Shanghai where different racial groups are in close contact yet remain highly stratified, the tension between the incest and miscegenation taboos is heightened as the push to “marry out” of the family vies with the demand to “marry in” the social or racial group. Interestingly, both Freud and Levi-Strauss spend little time discussing the significance of the rule of endogamy. Freud’s focus on interiority and the Oedipal complex leaves the

undergirding of race invisible to his view while Levi Strauss downplays endogamy in favor of emphasizing the goal of exogamy: the acquisition of a male ally through the exchange of a woman. But the heretofore subterranean influence of endogamy bubbles up in this novel that takes mixed race subjectivity as its starting point.

An Impossible Exchange

Intervening in the logic of endogamy, the novel suggests racist endogamy threatens to hinder the development of the psyche. We witness how the development of the psyche is arrested when Mimi Lambert, another of the novel's central mixed race characters, encounters the endogamy circumscription. During the earlier portions of the novel, Mimi seems to have the most fully integrated subjectivity; she lacks the uncertainty that plagues both Feng and her good childhood friend Sylvia. According to Sylvia, Mimi "puts people at their ease because she has no self-consciousness" and "asks nothing of herself—she is" (12). Mimi's seemingly carefree existence is also often manifested in her thoughtless cruelty, for "she was almost conscienceless" (73). As a child, Mimi tortured one of the family's servants by cutting off her braids and placing them in her hand as she slept. She arouses further surprise by unabashedly admitting she committed the act. She finds sadistic pleasure in such mischievous behavior that for her can make "a small holiday out of a customary twenty-four hours" (128). As Mimi ages, her confidence is no longer evidenced in the absence of a conscience and childish cruelty but rather becomes closely linked to her

femininity. Indeed, overt acts of aggression like cutting off a servant's hair are replaced by other behaviors, while still scandalous, that can be construed as accidental and designed to further her desirability to men. For example, Mimi recounts an evening when her panties fell to the floor while ballroom dancing and she simply "stepped out of them," hung them from her elbow "like a lace-edged handkerchief," and "danced on." Rather than claiming the scene as demonstrative of her free-spirited independence, she ends her tale by demurring to the spin her dancing partner had put on the anecdote; he "blamed the accident on the tango [they] were doing" (129). Rather than a clear act of will, Mimi's daring behavior as a "properly" gendered woman is interpreted as merely reactive, a humorous response to what might have been a humiliating accident. Furthermore, the scene is clearly embedded in gender codes that situate Mimi both partnered and subordinated to a man, her dancing partner, and as a spectacle for male desire.

To those around her, Mimi appears to have moved seamlessly from girlhood to traditional femininity. "When she was a child and tanned," Mimi's "thoughtlessness made her tomboyish." But by the age of thirteen "she had suddenly filled out, grown aware of her femininity" so that "her thoughtlessness might be called 'abandon'" (73). While the former account of Mimi's transition into femininity suggests an organic progression, the following passage marks a moment of conscious transition into normative gender roles:

Without undue egotism, Mimi Lambert had always known she was “a beauty,” had always recognized her own assets. Long ago, when she was twelve, she had studied herself in the mirror and had decided how to toss her hair back, how to cross her impeccable legs, how to look into a boys eyes for maximum results. Having mastered he own personality, she was almost able to forget it—at least to forget it enough so that even forgetfulness added to her charm. She was carelessly beautiful, lazily feminine, casually flirtatious. (33)

Certainly, there is strong evidence here of Lacan’s mirror stage, with its suggestion of mastery of an otherwise fragmented body. But in this case, Mimi’s self-mastery originates in the process of acceding to a feminine role and in a careful “forgetfulness that adds to her charm.” Feminine mastery, or rather mastery of femininity, and forgetfulness, it seems, go hand in hand.

The seeming ease with which Mimi is able to accede to the feminine role does appear to lie in her ability to forget what Gayle Rubin has referred to as the “psychic brutality” entailed by the “creation of ‘femininity’ in the course of socialization” (196). Mimi encounters her very own tree of knowledge, getting her first lesson on gender difference as a child while perched aloft a tree branch with another girl who reveals to her that “boys are different from girls” and “they do things to girls.” This newly discovered information causes Mimi’s heart to race though “she did not understand why she should be frightened” (72). Mimi thus

learns that men are the active subjects who “do things” to women as passive objects, a bit of knowledge she finds mysterious and threatening. Still young enough to climb trees like tomboys, both Mimi and her young elucidator (whose possession of a voice that is “always deep” significantly signals a degree of female masculinity) stare down the barrel of heteronormative femininity. Mimi may acquiesce to a passive feminine role or attempt to resist it and maintain the tomboyish “masculine” aggression that characterized her early childhood. We learn Mimi inexplicably “disliked the girl later,” ultimately rejecting the alternate gender construction represented by this unnamed deep-voiced girl. “Soon the whole incident was forgotten,” as Mimi proves able to repress her newfound understanding of the psychological violence entailed in the acquisition of femininity (73). Importantly, Mimi, the female character most at ease with her femininity, is also she who has the most highly developed skills of repression.

And Mimi benefits from her powers of repression for a while. Provided that it is successfully done, repression is both socially useful and morally necessary in the view of classic psychoanalysis though it has come to signify an unhealthy psyche in popular conceptions. Repression is key to the dissolution of the Oedipal complex (the child must repress his desire for the mother) and, as Freud argues in “Civilization and its Discontents,” the repression of libidinal impulses enables moral and intellectual development. As we have seen, Mimi exemplifies traditional femininity, mastering its requirement of seeming passivity and participating in her own objectification. Having repressed its violence, she

appears at ease with her feminine identity. While Sylvia struggles with her racially mixed feminine identity, she observes that Mimi “has no self-consciousness” and “asks nothing of herself—she is” (12). Through a studied deployment of “feminine capriciousness,” Mimi is able to control others. Her frequently theatrical behaviors, such as wearing her panties on her arm, “transfixed” her friends, women as well as men (10). Clearly, Mimi is able to deploy femininity effectively to control others. As such, *Frontiers of Love* importantly challenges any oversimplified equation between femininity and passivity. Despite its apparent investment in Freudian psychoanalysis, the novel further offers a critique of psychoanalytic accounts of successful femininity insofar as its mastery hinges upon a preceding disciplining and subjugation of the self. Mastery for women, the novel suggests, is built, however paradoxically, upon a foundation of masochism.

Insofar as Freud believed successful heterosexual womanhood to be passive and successful heterosexual manhood to be active, a degree of masochism for women is not simply acceptable but necessary. For the female child, aggressive impulses or any desire for mastery must be channeled inward first and foremost. Freud does note how sadism can undergo unanticipated transformations in the following explanation:

Masochism, in the form of a perversion, seems to be further removed from the normal sexual aim than from its counterpart; it may be doubted at first whether it can ever occur as a primary phenomenon or whether, on the contrary, it may not invariably arise

from a transformation of sadism. It can often be shown that masochism is nothing more than an extension of sadism turned round on the subject's own self, which thus, to begin with, takes the place of the sexual object (252).

Though Freud makes clear the possibility that sadism may be transformed into masochism, it seems for psychoanalysis' ideal woman sadism *must* be transformed into masochism. In Mimi's case, the degree to which she is able to gain control of others is directly proportional to the degree in which she is able to successfully discipline herself as subject to the regime of femininity. Mimi, for example, believes she holds Robert, her lover, on a thread as a kite so that "all she had to do was to tug at the thread gently" and Robert would "come toward her." But this kite's thread is wound, shackle-like, on the "spool of her third finger," the "finger of betrothal" (130). Whatever power Mimi feels she has depends upon her assumption that Robert will marry her; thus her power stems from her anticipation of marriage, where her subordination to a man would become juridically inscribed.

Mimi's dependence on Robert is further illustrated when she entirely loses her usual self composure upon learning that Robert will not marry her despite his knowledge of her pregnancy. As a result, she claws at him "as though a shred of his clothing were her ultimate desire" (174). While it may seem that it would be her child that Mimi is so desperate to have legitimated through a marriage with Robert, it is she who first needs to be legitimated. Without Robert "she was

essentially homeless,” and “by loving him and being loved by him, she was assured of a status for herself and a ‘society’ to which to belong.” (74). Not only is Mimi’s social status derived from her attachment to Robert, any self-knowledge she does gain—and in this novel, self-knowledge is sacred—also derives from him. We are told, “Before Robert, Mimi had never been even remotely touched by any other experience.” Mimi was “unhurt, unawakened,” and “had been a virgin even in the matter of her parents’ dying” (71). Indeed, Robert does awaken Mimi, but this is not simply a sexual awakening but a racial one. The trauma of racialization and its significance within a colonial context is dramatized in the following scene between Mimi, her Aunt Juliet, and Robert:

“And yet you cannot marry her because—because your father will not,” and [Aunt Juliet] spaced out the words slowly and raised her voice, “your father will not countenance your marrying a Eurasian!” Robert stood up, his neck taut, his eyes wincing. Mimi screamed once. She put out her hand accusingly. She put it out as though it were a sword on fire.

“Can you deny it!” Aunt Juliet challenged. “Nothing will change the fact of her Eurasianness!”

“You” Mimi screamed, staring at them both, but she was pointing at Yima. “You-ou!” (174)

Aunt Juliet, known for flouting convention, speaks what is for Mimi and Robert the unspeakable: the “fact” of Mimi’s Eurasian identity. After this scene of racial

revelation, Mimi violently thrashes herself against Robert, aborting her pregnancy. “Poisoned by her own self,” Mimi becomes “awkward” and “vindictive” as she finally faces the reality that her nearly perfect acquisition of femininity cannot negate the significance of her racial difference (174).

Given how heavily psychoanalysis informs *Frontiers*, this scene is an important point of intervention in classic psychoanalysis’ construction of knowledge. Psychoanalysis sees self-knowledge as produced by a rigorous investigation of one’s sexual desires. But as Sandra Baringer writes in her discussion of the novel, “Mimi has been so preoccupied with using the master’s tools to construct a gender identity that she has overlooked the implications of her raced body” (115). I would take Baringer’s claim a step further to suggest that if Mimi has “overlooked” race she has done so willfully in yet another act of repression. Having repressed the significance of her racial identity, Mimi’s self-knowledge remains incomplete until Aunt Juliet, savvy to the racial politics of colonial China, forces it to the surface. Mimi discovers that in as much as she might have perfected the “art” of femininity, her racial identity precludes the fulfillment of traditional feminine identity that is achieved by becoming a wife complicit with the rule of endogamy.

In Mimi’s plight, then, we see the dual forces of exogamy and endogamy at work. Aunt Juliet’s comments intimate the tension between the two imperatives. She explains to Robert the conflict:

Mimi needs you because she has no father, and you are father, lover and husband to her; you need her because you have the kind of father you have, but you cannot help her make the kind of family she wants because you already belong to a too strong family.

(173)

Robert needs Mimi, according to her aunt, in order to individuate from his parents and create a self-contained existence, a family of his own. But Robert remains too closely tied to his family and thus fails to follow the rule of exogamy, a failure intimated in Robert's description of his relationship with his father. Robert declares, "There is someone else." He later explains, "My father has always been 'the other person' in the picture" (172). It is the rule of the father that prevents Robert's marriage to Mimi, just as it is the father that initiates the incest prohibition. The father here is the embodiment of the law, but the novel interrogates the reach of the father's rule in this instance. Classic psychoanalysis posits the father as the representative of the law, as he whose presence establishes incest prohibition. But in suggesting the father is "the other person" in the relationship, much like an amorous interloper, the novel troubles the reach of this father's law by suggesting it violates the original prohibition itself, not to mention the implication of failed heterosexuality.

Since Mimi is an orphan, Robert would, as Juliet suggests, occupy the positions of "father, lover, and husband" at once. Marrying Mimi would thus signal his individuation and ascendance as a patriarch in his own right. The positions of

father, lover and husband are further suggestive of the tripartite structure of the Freudian trinity (superego, id, and ego). But should Robert successfully separate from his parents and marry Mimi, he would violate the rule of endogamy by becoming entangled in a marriage to a woman considered to be too far outside of his social group in mid-century Shanghai. Mimi is an orphan, and as such, not only would Robert's marriage to her violate the rule of endogamy, but it would also fail to offer even racially questionable male-male alliances, additionally dissolving the existing bond between Robert and his father. Rather than producing male bonds, this marriage threatens to destroy them. By Strauss' account, the dissolution of these bonds is the greatest transgression, greater even than the other more infamous "sin" of Oedipus. To reiterate my earlier discussion, Strauss argues that Freud is wrong to focus so heavily on the incest taboo because it is not the problem of incest that drives the exogamy imperative, but rather it is anxiety over the bonds that would be lost in the absence of an exogamous exchange that makes incest forbidden. Incest is thus undesirable according to Levi-Strauss primarily because it means the loss of a potential male ally. Robert's troubles with individuating from his father in this light are greatly exacerbated by Mimi's racial difference. Racial hierarchies as structured by colonialism make the satisfaction of the two imperatives, exogamy and endogamy, impossible for Robert in the context of his relationship with Mimi; Robert is left with the choice between either failing to individuate (remaining

locked in a quasi-incestuous relationship with his father) or violating the imperative of endogamy (marrying she who is unmarriageable by virtue of race).

Forging Mixed Race Subjectivity

Sylvia, the most successful of the text's three central mixed race characters, is initially like Mimi in that she seeks to individuate from her parents by becoming attached to a man, in her case Feng. She originally looked to Feng for her sense of gender identity. "Feng's love," she tells us, "was her illumination" (183). Sylvia's description of her relationship with Feng echoes archaic metaphors for heterosexual relationships in which the masculine sun casts its light upon the feminine moon who passively receives its "illumination." But in this illumination Sylvia is both made visible and eclipsed, feeling "like a photographic plate which was less than nothing when exposed to light" (183). In addition to offering the potential for heteronormative completeness, Feng is also attractive to her because he gives her the hope for a stable ethnic identity. For example, she revels in the fact that she and Feng are "two white Chinese" (126). After she and Feng are arrested by Japanese soldiers for celebrating loudly in the streets shortly after the announcement of Japan's impending defeat, the soldiers take the arrestees to a building where they place them in groups organized by race and nationality. Mimi, who, like Sylvia and Feng, grew up in China, is placed with a group of foreigners while Sylvia and Feng are placed together in their own separate group. According to Shirley Geok-lin Lim's introduction to the novel, "this scene enacts in microcosm the geopolitical divisions of people through

arbitrarily applied categories of race and nationality the better to enforce a tyranny of one group that has itself set up as superior” (xii). Clearly, the logic employed to group the prisoners according race is fuzzy at best; the soldiers waver between competing national and physiognomic conceptions of race—both of which are further troubled by their mixed race prisoners.

While Lim is certainly correct to note the novel’s critique of the use of racial categories by one group to subordinate another, the pleasure Sylvia feels at being categorized with Feng deserves some comment. When the soldier tells her to “go with the other white Chinese,” Sylvia’s “heart leaped inordinately with something close to joy” (120). This scene evidences how racial categorization may be desired by the very subjects it is meant to subordinate. As illustrated in the scene of Sylvia and Feng’s detainment, racial identity involves a complex interplay between the dominant group’s goal of maintaining a racial hierarchy and the desire of the subordinated group to be recognized. Such a desire for racial recognition has a special valance for the mixed race subject whose racial and cultural liminality may produce an ambivalent relationship with both parents’ racial groups. Sylvia notes how “people never ceased to be curious about her” because she both has many characteristics of a foreigner such as an “impatient” gait and “yet in her there was something inescapably Oriental” (5). In addition, the Japanese soldiers joke after learning that Feng, Mimi, and Sylvia are Chinese that the “Chinese look like white devils tonight,” telling them they are “Chinese, but not exactly so” (119). Prevailing monoracial thinking places mixed race

subjects at the margins of any racial group, whether dominant or subordinate, and marks them as curious sites for racial investigation. As such, Sylvia rejoices at her categorization with Feng in a group of their own rather than as conspicuously tenuous members of a monoracial group.

But this recognition at once opens up the possibility of a distinct mixed-race subjectivity and also exposes a hierarchy between those who seek recognition and those who have the power to grant it. It seems virtually impossible to read this taxonomic scene in which Feng and Sylvia are classified as “white Chinese” without being reminded of Althusser’s articulation of interpellation, the process through which the subject is formulated in and through subjection. Despite these seemingly clearly organized positions of guard/prisoner, the novel intimates that the relative positions of the two groups are contextual and thus unstable. After the release of the Potsdam Declaration laying out the terms of Japanese surrender just a few days prior, the Japanese guards who are performing the racial categorization are on the verge of losing their authority and potentially becoming prisoners themselves. This uncertainty is dramatized when one of the soldiers entertains his prisoners with a dance. Sylvia narrates his performance:

He swung his hips and staggered delicately as a woman. He imitated the gestures of a geisha girl or a Chinese female entertainer. It was a performance of utter self-denigration. The Japanese defeat was explicit in his identifying himself with a

woman, a woman who surrendered her personal dignity to the pleasures of men. He danced a gavotte of Japanese psychology, and it was painful to Sylvia as if he had been nude. (121)

The soldier performs a masquerade of femininity as Japanese control over China yields to the Allied defeat of Japan. As a spectator, Sylvia's observation of the performance is highly vexed as she bears witness at once to her captor's defeat and China's twice enacted feminization as first dominated by Japan and then "rescued" by Allied forces. Having lived in colonial Shanghai where, prior to the war, Chinese, along with dogs, were refused entrance into certain parts of the city, Sylvia could only have experienced China's liberation by Western forces with a degree of ambivalence. Linking denigration to femininity, even what Sylvia sees as an unpropitious femininity, further complicates any pleasure Sylvia might take in watching her captor become divested of his power. As such, his dance remains "painful to Sylvia."

Importantly, the novel here complicates any notion of power as unilateral. Though detained by the guards, Sylvia's perception of the experience quickly shifts from feeling caught in a "nightmare that had solidified into reality" to being an audience to the "perfunctory show" of control put on by the "sheepishly" laughing Japanese soldiers. Sylvia then shows herself to be a defiant prisoner, "staring" the guard "down with a neutral look in her eye" and thinking "if anyone tried to touch her again, she'd fight back, and she was afraid of what might happen then" (119). This scene reveals the transitory nature of power, and

everyone involved appears to know it. *Frontiers* thus challenges the idea that the categorization of the mixed race subjects as such, even when that categorization is pejoratively stated as “white Chinese,” equates with unqualified subordination. If anything, Sylvia seems to be relieved, experiencing “something close to joy,” by the reprieve from perpetually needing to explain her tenuous status as part of a more established racial group.

What Sylvia describes as a “gavotte of Japanese psychology” further outlines the effects of the public and political on the individual psyche as the soldier’s feminine display is, quite clearly, not linked to specifically female embodiment. Another such instance of the such external factors bearing down on the psyche is illustrated in Mimi’s final scene in the novel. When we last leave Mimi, she has met up with a group of American soldiers. Shortly thereafter, she has sex with one of the soldiers on a public street even though “she was repelled by him, by his pulling her skirt up to her waist” (232) With “nothing to fear any longer,” Mimi feels “cold and public.” (232) According to Sylvia, Mimi ends up “dramatizing the feeling of her own invisibility” (238). Despite its feminist tendencies, the novel maintains a rather rigid concept of acceptable feminine behavior, and in this context, Mimi’s public sex act is surely meant to signify the depths of her demise. Beyond this significance, the scene illustrates how issues of sex and gender, which classic psychoanalysis would constitute as interior and universal, are heavily informed by specific historical circumstances. The scene signals how the “private” matter of sex is shaped by the professedly “public”

issues of race and nation such that interracial sex is literally made public on the streets of Shanghai, perforating the division between the supposed interiority of sex and exteriority of race that has been constructed by classic psychoanalysis.

In its treatment of *Sylvia*, *Frontiers* follows the familiar trajectory of the female bildungsroman in American women's literature, where the proper development of the individual is foregrounded as the necessary precondition for a marriageable subject (regardless of whether the novel ends in the subject's marriage or not). Nina Baym observes, "the happy marriages with which most—though not all—of this fiction concludes are symbols of successful accomplishment of the required task and resolutions of the basic problems raised in the story, which is in most primitive terms the story of the formation and assertion of the feminine ego" (12). Baym's reading of this common plotline maps a tradition in women's fiction that highlights the importance of women's full development as individuals rather than situating female development as a resultant of marriage. Like many of the protagonists in women's fiction Baym analyzes, *Sylvia*'s plotline does not end in marriage. After terminating her relationship with Feng, *Sylvia* learns "from her dependency the necessity for being separate" (236). "She was *Sylvia* Chen," *Sylvia* determines, "and she would speak out for herself—an entity composed of both her parents, but ready to act and not merely react, for one individual—herself." With this new independence *Sylvia* "seemed to take her first breath of life" (237). In this way,

Frontiers constructs a narrative of female development that values the woman as an autonomous subject regardless of marital status.

Baringer describes Sylvia's development as a "proto-feminist 'subversion' of the romantic subplot" in which "Sylvia challenges the terms of gender identification by pursuing an autonomy that echoes the rugged individualist paradigm of American individualist heroes" (117). In the end, Baringer reads Sylvia as a character stuck in a passive state because we last see her in the novel looking out into the sea, "expect[ing] a new and sudden vision" (240). Sylvia's identity remains incomplete in Baringer's view; she argues, "[Sylvia's] search for identity does not, however, achieve a totally satisfactory resolution in terms of establishing a transgendered, cross-racial, cross-cultural subjectivity that possesses a clear sense of agency" (117). Just as Mimi's troubles stem from a complex interplay of gender and race that are tightly woven into the endogamy and exogamy imperatives, so is Sylvia's relative success due to her ability to negotiate these prescriptions without being, like Mimi, "injured into nonexistence" (238). Nonetheless, Baringer sees Sylvia's development as incomplete.

By closely reexamining Sylvia's final appearance in the penultimate chapter of the text, the potential to read that scene in a more hopeful manner emerges. Sylvia stands expecting "a new and sudden vision" as she gazes out into the vastness of the ocean, which Baringer reads as a problematic passive state. But the sentence that precedes that description reveals "the ocean

seemed to Sylvia to be more immediate than it had ever been before” and it “felt like an invisible beachhead on a level with her eyes” (240). Her suggestion that the ocean “*felt*” (rather than looked) like an “*invisible* beachhead” is a curious turn of phrase [emphasis mine]. Despite its stated invisibility, this beachhead is somehow “on a level with her eyes.” There is a purposeful conflation of physical sight and metaphysical sight at play in this line that is evocative of a heroic visionary who, like Joan of Arc, fearlessly surveys a potential battle.

But is Sylvia an aggressor or defender? Sylvia’s discussion of the development of her consciousness in the immediately preceding paragraphs provides some illumination. Recalling her arrival in Nanking nine years earlier at the age of eleven, Sylvia thinks, “[W]hat chance have I in this old populated land, what chance have I to exist at all?”. To her it “seemed she could only beg in this life of other people’s riches” (239). In the face of this sense of deprivation, Sylvia arrives at some understanding of what is entailed in forging one’s identity. She provides the following analysis:

When would she feel real, accepted and accepting? When would she feel--as well as know--that her world existed only because she truly existed, that she lived a legitimate life and was her own witness? For each man was his own witness. It was a responsibility and a gift you could not evade. No one else could supply one’s own center. Without self, the world would not exist. You supplied your own evidence of it. She had known that as soon as she knew *that*

in her heart--and she no longer seemed to want to avoid the knowledge--she would understand life and identity itself. (239)

In this passage Sylvia indicates the gravity of feeling rather than knowing who one is in the world. Lim similarly identifies the importance of feeling in the novel more broadly, suggesting feeling “becomes the domain of individual action in which what is beautiful and good are decided; and ineluctable necessity for material struggle rather than an expendable luxury built on class privilege” (xvi). Earlier Sylvia *feels* as though the ocean is an “invisible beachhead,” and in this instance, she cites the need to “*feel* real” and “*feel*--as well as know--that her world existed only because she truly existed” [emphasis mine] (239). This feeling stems from being one’s “own witness” and supplying one’s “own evidence.” The emphasis on feeling here, I would suggest, signals unsanctioned knowledge which, because it contradicts established ideas, must be registered by the subject as something other than “knowledge.”

In *Black Skin White Masks*, Frantz Fanon articulates a similar confrontation with knowledge structures that stand in contradiction to the raced subject’s own understanding. In attempting to piece together a reasoned defense against racist beliefs, he finds himself perpetually at odds with the “the history that others have compiled for me” (120). He recounts, “I was hated, despised, detested, not by the neighbor across the street or my cousin on my mother’s side, but by an entire race.” Fanon ultimately concludes, “I was up against something unreasoned.” Determined “to rationalize the world and to show the

white man that he was mistaken,” he initially believes reason will prevail over the irrationality of racism (118). Nonetheless, that “victory played cat and mouse.” “In the abstract, there was agreement: The negro is a human being,” but, Fanon laments, “on certain points the white man remained intractable” (119-20). One arena in which racist attitudes remain most entrenched was attitudes about race mixing. He explains, “Under no conditions did [the white man] wish intimacy between the races, for it is a truism that ‘crossings between widely different races can lower the physical and mental level.’” The poor logic underwriting such thinking causes him later to exclaim, “What a shameful science!” (120).

Sylvia seems to have arrived at a similar breaking point with the psychoanalytic discourse of identity formation available to her. Accordingly, rather than investigating her origins in light of family dynamics as psychoanalysis would direct her to do, Sylvia has come to realize she must “supply [her] own evidence” of her existence. Identity, in other words, is forged by the raced subject through the constant struggle for self-creation. It is thus that *Frontiers* mobilizes the terminology of warfare (i.e. the “invisible beachhead”) in Sylvia’s final scene.

This relatively hopeful state at which Sylvia eventually arrives is foreshadowed even in her earliest descriptions, when she yet seems an unlikely heroine. At the time the novel introduces Sylvia, she is uncertain about her position as a Eurasian in Shanghai witnessing the deterioration of colonialism. Neither Western nor traditional Chinese clothing seem appropriate for her,

signifying her racial and cultural ambivalence. Sylvia characterizes both vestures' failings:

That was the trouble with Chinese dresses; they expressed a kind of aristocratic demureness. But foreign clothes didn't suit her entirely either. Their full skirts seemed to stand out from her, making her slighter than she was, orphaned in them. (4)

Sylvia feels "orphaned" in her western clothing, inviting comparison to Mimi by figuratively connecting her to Mimi's actual circumstance of being orphaned at a young age. The two are both orphaned insofar as neither clearly belongs to any ethnic community. While Mimi attempts to replicate the type of family she lost, Sylvia reveals a desire to create something new out of this orphaning, which enables Sylvia's eventual independence. After contemplating the ill fit of both Chinese and Western clothing, Sylvia decides she "shall have to design [her] own kind of clothes, a modified Chinese dress," even if such a creation signifies her distance from both cultures (4). The passage marks Sylvia's inability to fit into conventional racial and cultural categories, advocating instead for mixed race's rearticulation, the process described by Omi and Winant whereby racial identity is imbued with a meaning different from that which is prescribed by dominant social order (99). As such, Sylvia decides to embrace her difference from both western and eastern conceptualizations of selfhood and to forge a uniquely mixed race identity.

Through Sylvia, the text rejects the trope of the tragic mulatto suggested by Mimi's narrative thread. Mimi has fully enacted the rites of femininity, and she nonetheless ends tragically. As such, Mimi's story reveals the specificity, as opposed to universality, of classic psychoanalysis, which has lost its explanatory power when confronted with the mixed race subject. Its limitations, it seems, are exposed.

Mimi's apparently pristine execution of femininity stands in stark contrast to another character's strained attempts at idealized femininity. What Sylvia terms "schizophrenic east of the twentieth century" is embodied in the figure of Yiao ching, "the schizophrenic Chinese girl who bleached her hair platinum" (46). In her striving for idealized femininity, she is "most consistent" for she "always matched her Hollywood coiffure to wedge shoes, and used hatboxes for handbags, slung a trophy of dead fur around her neck." Sylvia was familiar with Yiao ching's "small bewildered Chinese face, the leaf-shaped eyes which peered from under the platinum mop, as she sidled in and out of shops, signing checks with her Parker 51 pen" (47). In her description, Yiao ching is a caricature of mid-century American femininity, including its pronounced consumerism.

Notably, the products Yiao ching conspicuously consumes are not simply signifiers of wealth but are signs of American culture. "That Parker pen saved her," we learn, "as did that Ronson lighter, these American gadgets that every Chinese who called himself modern coveted and obtained by illegal means" (47). Yet Yiao ching, despite her attempts at Americanization, "still operated as a

Chinese, a Lana Turner whose true image, if only she would probe deep enough, would always be Yang Kwei-fei, the Tang dynasty beauty” (47). Yiao ching’s inability to integrate the various and conflicting parts of the self causes devolution into madness. Such an integration, though, would seem impossible given the tension between identities Yiao ching vacillates between. Yang Kwei-fei, an eighth century imperial consort of the Emperor Xuanzong, certainly would not fit well into Western ideas of femininity or psychoanalytic ideas of the triadic family. Accordingly, there is no transcendence of race for Yiao ching despite her channeling Lana Turner, a signifier of idealized American femininity. If, as I stated earlier, we understand classic psychoanalysis as describing the processes of developing subjectivity, then subjects such as Mimi and Yiao ching expose its failure to speak to the experiences of colonial raced subjects.

Yet one understands this “failure” of psychoanalysis as a failure only if we accept its function as a system meant to describe and facilitate an ahistorical process by which subjects achieve fully autonomous subjecthood. But if we understand it as a discourse emerging from and invested in the regulation of raced subjects, then the demise of Mimi and Yiao ching function as evidence of its success in preserving the status quo; in this sense, they are preeminent testaments to its power, but in order for that power to be maintained, they must be disavowed or risk psychoanalysis’ exposure as a form of, to borrow Fanon’s term, unreason.

It is the latter understanding of classic psychoanalysis at which Sylvia ultimately arrives. Because the text interrogates classic psychoanalysis as part of a racist apparatus, it leaves us with Sylvia standing at the edge of the water awaiting a “new and sudden vision” (240). In other words, the text does develop Sylvia’s storyline to the point that it proposes what this alternative family/social structure looks like. But it nonetheless rejects its contemporaneous systems of racialization and gendering. The text does reject marriage as a destination for Sylvia, but given that kinship practices enable racialization, this rejection of marriage is not just a feminist stance but must be understood as an anti-racist one.

Sylvia has achieved the greatest degree of autonomy in the novel, yet the final chapter is significantly told from Liyi’s perspective--it is the father who gets the final say. *Frontiers* importantly resists casting marriage as the necessary culmination of feminine development; recall that Sylvia, the most successful of the central characters in Chang’s novel, is last seen alone and Mimi, the character of that novel who comes closest to marriage, ends tragically. One might wonder how after all its efforts at staving off the marriage imperative in favor of a heightened sense of autonomy, it appears that Chang’s text cannot fully sustain its resistance to the gendered implications of the Oedipal model. For not only does the privileging of Liyi’s voice establish him as a patriarch, but it also it repositions Sylvia as a daughter, subject to his authority. If Sylvia is not defined

by her role as a wife, the text might be said to capitulate, she is then defined by her role as a daughter.

Yet the seeming reestablishment of traditional feminine roles defined by familial relationships to men that could be suggested by the structure of the novel is not supported by the actual content of the last chapter. Alone but expecting a “new and sudden vision” when we see her last, Sylvia does not disclose to us a clear view of the future--but neither does Liyi. If anything, the text draws a parallel relationship rather than a hierarchical one between daughter and father. Liyi “was quite tired,” feeling that “he could sleep at last, and wake up ready for clarity” (246). Much like Sylvia, Liyi is left on the verge of some understanding which remains elusive as the text closes.

In the closing chapter, the Chens stay at a vacation rental home, and while there, Liyi, contemplates its difference from the historic Chen family home. According to Liyi, the summerhouse “was new, un-lived-in compared with the old homestead”, and its “face was unlined, empty of history” (242). The summerhouse is contrasted with the old homestead in the description Liyi offers:

In Sunki-ang [Liyi] had remembered and looked for the step-worn slabs, the ghost chair's evoking a kind of intimacy with the dead, the courtyards that lead you into the heart of the family. They were all present—it was just that the expression had been changed, as though his memory had suspended an atmosphere over the scene, which he could not find when he was actually there. He had looked

at everything as a stranger might, trying to find the meaning that these rambling rooms used to hold. And the people—his in-laws and nephews and nieces—it was as though they were related to another person. They could not be integrated with what he now was. (242)

The summerhouse, “empty of history,” stands in contrast to the Chen family homestead, which remains backwards looking, always leading toward the “heart of the family.”

A cursory reading of the juxtaposition of these two homes might suggest a privileging of the history-free nature of the summer home as opposed to the Chen family home, which is problematically positioned in the text as counterdirectional to the path leading toward a more progressive worldview. Nonetheless, while the text does reject a return to the “heart of the family” represented by the Chen family home, it similarly rejects the emptiness of the summer home. While remembering his trip to the Chen homestead, Liyi, standing in the summer home realizes it “suddenly seemed like a cage, a cave in which he could only be sick” (242). Both Sylvia and Liyi seem to come to the realization that progress requires rethinking of the ideas of home and family.

It becomes apparent earlier in the text that Liyi is acutely aware of the social changes rapidly occurring around him:

There were other evolutions and renaissances: Confucius was being supplanted by Christ and John Dewey; free love was taking

the pace of family-arranged marriages; emulation of the West was replacing ancestor worship; birth control, Imagism, proletarian literature, co-education, divorce, the doing away with subtleties of a double standard of morality for men and women--Liyi was in the midst of all these changes. Being among them, he was not fully aware of the cultures he was straddling, of the props that were being pulled from under him. (163)

In response to all these changes, Liyi had previously longed for the certainties of the past. He seeks “to evoke a simple world: a world in which men and women were plain, labeled categories, and a father-emperor ruled with benevolent tyranny” (164). Yet by the final chapter, Liyi’s views have progressed so that he believes there “was no time for hatred or for any vows except mutuality” (246). Rather than prescribing a singular idea of how mutuality ought to appear, instead Liyi asserts “[I]f life was not to be resolved, but to be lived--a constant improvisation” (245). There is some suggestion of an “improvised” family structure evidenced in the bonds forged among a group of “outsiders” in Shanghai. The novel provides a catalog of its members:

Larry Casement was Irish, Hasan Kemal a Turk, Robert Bruno was Swiss, the Jastrows were Jewish, and Feng Huang, Mimi Lambert and Sylvia Chen were Eurasians. No one of them was Chinese. And none of them could be alien in the secure way that an American or Britisher could be. (13)

The group meets at the home of the Jastrows, and none of them occupies a clear position in wartime Shanghai. In fact, it is “being ‘out of things’” that acted as “the common denominator which held them together--their world carved in one dimension, between the second dimension of the foreign colony and the third of the Chinese matrix” (13). With her constructed family, Sylvia even feels more at home in the Jastrow’s house than in her own home: “‘My living room’ she thought again. It offered Sylvia more privacy than at her own home, which was dominated by her mother. Here she felt free, she did not have to account for herself at all” (7). Out of their marginalization, this group manages to create an intimate sense of belonging, signaling the possibility of powerful bonds outside of kinship systems.

While all the members of this “family” share outsider status, the Jastrows come to occupy a special place in the group. Sylvia explains how they “were the solid center of the group that met, welded to each other, settled and complete.” The fact that the Jastrows function as the group’s nucleus is directly linked to their familial status. Sylvia offers the observation:

Having a child, the only child of the group, they were committed to reality; the others, and among them Sylvia included herself, were unmarried, with themselves alone to possess, and were committed only to a future escape. (7)

In short, the Jastrows form the triadic family, heterosexual, reproductive and complete with father, mother and infant boy. Their monoracial family structure

further makes them “sufficient unto themselves” so that they “seemed to have acquired an invisibility” (7). Employing the tools of psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on individuation, results in a continual doubling back to the traditional family structure represented by the Jastrows despite these marginal characters’ attempt to create an alternative to the Oedipal model.

Indeed, what might appear to be mutually exclusive narratives of the function of exogamy—one viewing it as a proactive move toward alliance and the other viewing it as a default reaction to incest prohibition—offered by Levi-Strauss and Freud actually prove to be interwoven. Foucault suggests psychoanalysis “rediscovered the law of alliance, the involved workings of marriage and kinship, and incest at the heart of this sexuality, as the principle of its formation and the key to its intelligibility.” It is the “guarantee that one would find the parents-children relationship at the root of everyone’s sexuality” which, according to Foucault, “made it possible—even when everything seemed to point to the reverse process—to keep the deployment of sexuality coupled to the system of alliance” (113). Thus while the introspection required by psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on the solitary individual, might seem to provide the tools for removing sexuality from the service of kinship, Foucault reveals how the Oedipal structure that the individual is sure to uncover during the process of such introspection nonetheless keeps the two systems intertwined. The coupling of these two systems not only makes necessary the exchange of women that marks them as subordinate but also reifies racial hierarchies.

The psychoanalytic method of introspection keeps cycling the novel's mixed race characters back to the kinship structure whose endogamy imperative ensures their inability to achieve full subjectivity. As such, *Frontiers* ultimately rejects this method and further challenges the legitimacy of psychoanalysis' goal of the unified subject. While Barringer is correct to state that Sylvia's identity does not arrive at a "resolution in terms of establishing a transgendered, cross-racial, cross-cultural subjectivity that possesses a clear sense of agency," one can, however, call into question whether that lack of resolution is not "satisfactory" as Barringer asserts (117). Quite the contrary, the absence of resolution is, I would argue, precisely the point.

Frontiers reveals how mixed race subjects present for psychoanalysis a problem that it cannot solve, intimating even its purposeful failure to shepherd mixed race subjects toward full subjecthood. Rather than prescribing a new narrative of development into which the experiences of the mixed race subject can be sutured, the novel proposes prioritizing lived experience. For example, Liyi reveals his children's world "was wonderfully corporeal" with "problems" that came "day by day, budgeted." Realizing that life "was not to be resolved, but to be lived--a constant improvisation," Liyi further feels "he was more prepared to take things as they came--and to act upon them with his senses all awake, responsible" (245). In this worldview, the teleology of the unified subject of classic psychoanalysis is abandoned. In doing so, it derails the eternal return to the monoracial triadic family, whose demand for the simultaneous satisfaction of

the endogamy and exogamy imperatives cannot be satisfied by the mixed race subject. We are offered in its stead a more pragmatic “wonderfully corporeal” approach which takes experience in and through the body as its starting point. As such, *The Frontiers of Love* suggests mixed race subjects would no longer be perpetually weighed down by the need to establish their legitimacy but are freed to become “new citizens for an expanding century” (245).

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Chapter 2

“But You Can’t Make Substitutions for Parents”:

Mixed Race Subjects and the Question of Allegiance

While Diana Chang’s *Frontiers of Love* takes as its primary interest the identity construction of the mixed race subject and the problems that accrue around attempts to map a classic psychoanalytic model onto the mixed race subject, Aimee Liu’s *Face* considers whether the construct of mixed race is productive in achieving a more egalitarian society for all racialized subjects or whether it sacrifices a coalition with monoracially raced subjects in order to obtain higher “almost white” status for those identified as racially mixed. *Face* was published in 1994 during a period in which the mixed race movement was gaining strength, drawing attention to the increasing numbers of mixed race people in the United States and advocating to allow mixed race identification on the census. The ambivalence evidenced in Liu’s text bears the markings of late-twentieth-century debates among minority groups regarding the significance of mixed race in the United States’ national landscape. Specifically, *Face* examines the question whether race mixing signifies a desire to transcend racial categories or to obfuscate what are still significant racial hierarchies.

Although frequently discussed as a new phenomenon, classifying people as racially mixed in the United States has a long history. Most are familiar with the “one-drop rule” or the rule of hypodescent, which identified as black any person with a single drop of black blood. But the Census had categorized mixed

race African Americans separately from 1850 through 1920, excepting only the 1900 Census. The importance of maintaining separate categories for “mulattoes” (and at times “octoroons” and “quadroons”) diminished as Jim Crow segregation took hold.

Some late twentieth-century constructions problematically figured interracial marriage as the signifier sine qua non of a racially progressive society and thus mixed race people as its ideal subjects, but those involved in the mixed race movement generally understood mixed race identity as a “psychologically and socially difficult category to live with” such that “multiracial individuals must struggle for recognition in a society that does not fully welcome or officially acknowledge their existence” (Sundstrom, 21). Other voices were less enthusiastic about the articulation of mixed race identity. Of course, overtly racist attitudes which see race mixing as a threat to national purity have never really left the scene, yet even some progressives registered mixed race subjects as a menace to the solidarity of minority groups. Ronald Robles Sundstrom describes how “multiracialism is a target for liberals and those on the Left who are opposed to the institutionalization and spread of multiracial identity” insofar as it shapes “the demographics of traditionally dominant American delineated ethnoracial groups” (22). The concerns emanating from civil rights proponents were not wholly unfounded. Certain conservatives, such as Newt Gingrich and Ward Connerly, embraced the idea of including a multiracial category on the 2000 census because they viewed it as a step away from race consciousness and

toward having Americans being “quite simply, Americans” (qtd. in Sundstrom, 29). In other words, they saw mixed race as a step toward destabilizing minority racial identification and weakening the political power of those on the margins.

In addition to the uncomfortable alliance with civil rights detractors, there has been the incorporation of voices that deny the existence of race and thus mixed race as a meaningful concept from the inception of the modern multiracial movement. Indeed, it is an oddity of mixed race studies in academia that, nearly twenty years after the Census Bureau determined it would allow mixed race people to choose more than one identificatory category, collections addressing mixed race studies consistently include essays arguing against the very existence of mixed race. For example, in the recent collection *Philosophy and the Mixed Race Experience* published in 2016, two out of its eleven essays, those by J.L.A. Garcia and Jason D. Hill, focus on debunking the idea of race and thus mixed race. The otherwise strong collection thereby continues what appears to be an unfortunate tradition in mixed race studies of giving voice to positions that do not share the field’s underlying assumptions. This tendency is further visible in the inclusion of Ranier Spencer’s “New Racial Identities, Old Arguments” in the 2006 collection *Mixed Messages* and Cecile Ann Lawrence’s “Racelessness” in the 1995 collection *American Mixed Race*. Most assuredly, I do not advocate the outright silencing of racial skeptics, but the consistent inclusion of perspectives that challenge the very existence of mixed race in collections meant to focus on mixed race studies gives credence to the belief of some critics who see mixed

race identification as a “movement toward white privilege” or deracination (24). Furthermore, undue space and time must then be devoted by scholars of mixed race studies in responding to these too-familiar arguments, which often incorrectly assume the idea of mixed race necessarily entails a naive conceptualization of race as a biological fact or a monolithic, determinative social construction. Lastly, I would argue that the cavalier interrogation by others of mixed race people’s racial legitimacy is part and parcel of the social construction of mixed race in the United States (e.g., the familiar question “What are you?”), and that such a construction is mirrored in the academic realm when so much time is devoted to responding to inquiries contesting the concept’s legitimacy. It is amidst a period in the late twentieth century when these contentious interpretations of the significance of mixed race were especially heightened that *Face* enters the conversation.

Face’s twenty-nine-year-old protagonist, Maibelle Chung, is single and aggressively so, seeking out multiple intense but abbreviated relationships. The novel follows Maibelle, a former photographer, as she attempts to wrestle permanence from some of her many passing attachments despite a nagging urge to flee. The uncertainty of her attachments functions as a metaphor for a broader uncertainty regarding the identifications and allegiances of the racially mixed.

Maibelle is fleeing her family, which she has come to associate with past trauma, career disappointment, gendered expectations, and racial uncertainty.

The geographical space linked with all of these aversives is New York's Chinatown, where she spent her childhood and where she has thus assiduously avoided returning in adulthood. After getting a letter from an old friend, Tommy Wah, requesting that she perform the photography work for an ethnographic book on Chinatown, the memories of Chinatown come "creeping back" so that Maibelle is unsure whether she should "battle or embrace them." She had for so long "tried to block out all thought of the old neighborhood" (23). Through her self-exile from Chinatown, Maibelle attempts to free herself of the psychic weight of its associations.

Chinatown Trouble

Maibelle's heavily freighted relationship to Chinatown, I would argue, is not determined wholly by her personal history there and requires some space to properly contextualize. To begin, the broader cultural significance of Chinatown, a "foreign" space within domestic boundaries, in the national consciousness is an encumbrance that adds to her uncertain positioning as both a Chinese American and mixed race subject. Such uneasiness is dramatized in a scene where Maibelle, observing some tourists arriving by bus, is caught between Asian American protesters and the presumably white tourists who the text refers to as "Middle Americans." Chanting "Chinese people are humans too! Chinatown is not a zoo!" the protesters, who perform guerilla theater by directing flash photography in unison at the tour group, mistake Maibelle for one of the tourists (141). Confronting her, one protester chides, "Think we're putting on a good

show, huh? Come to the Chinatown zoo, lady?" (144). Though a native of Chinatown, Maibelle is misread by the monoracially-identified Asian American protesters; she runs away toward a place she considers a "safe haven," a store where she had spent much time as a child, and is soon after called "Lou fan" or "barbarian" by two spikey-haired young men loafing on the sidewalk (144). In this scene, her embodiment as a racially mixed person marks her as doubly foreign, marginalized from larger white society and from monoracial Asian Americans, and further delegitimizes Maibelle's claim to her home, history, and "safe haven."

Chinatown also bears notable historical significance in light of specifically mixed race Asian American identity, as it was in Chinatown that many of the earliest mixed race Asian Americans were born and lived. Though generally understood to be home to Chinese bachelor communities, a situation exacerbated by various state and, later, federal legislation barring Chinese immigration during the second half of the nineteenth century, Mary Ting Yi Lui's analysis of the 1870 census reveals that "a significant number of Chinese had clearly married white women and begun to establish families in the area" such that "over one-fourth of the Chinese men residing in the Sixth Ward were married to non-Chinese women" (154). The same was true of Chinatowns in other parts of the country. In writing *The Chinese At Home and Abroad* (1885), Willard Farwell describes white women living in San Francisco's Chinatown. Disdainfully, he writes, "Another surprising as well as disgusting feature developed in this investigation is the fact that there are numerous instances of white women living

and cohabitating with Chinamen in the relation of wives or mistresses” (15). While Chinatown outsiders expressed consternation regarding the interracial relationships observed inside the Chinatown community, Lui suggests such relationships were not uncommon. “Interracial marriage,” she notes, “remained the dominant if not the only marriage pattern for Chinese immigrant men in New York City” (154). Indeed, racially mixed families of New York’s Chinatown appeared to have formed a small community, with their residences “clustered on one street” (154).

The mixed race children produced by these interracial unions unsurprisingly drew the curiosity of those who lived outside of Chinatown. In an 1890 article discussing Chinatown, *Harper’s Weekly* engages the issue of mixed race children and asserts, “[I]t is only about twelve to fifteen years since these [interracial] marriages began, so that the children are all yet young. What kind of people the hybrids will prove to be is yet an unsolved problem” (qtd. in Lui, 147). In 1902, *The New York Times* published an article in which the writer determines mixed race children to be “a problem for which there is no solution” (qtd. in Lui, 150). The purportedly unsettled nature of “hybrids” or mixed race children, according to Lui, stands in contrast the ways that children in general were viewed at the time. She writes:

During the first half of the nineteenth century, popular and theological beliefs regarding the nature of children also changed dramatically. Believed to be born in a state of grace, children were

no longer seen as bearing the taint of original sin. These views of childhood innocence, however, were not extended to include Chinatown's mixed-race children, the physical evidence of the parents' sinful relationship" (147).

Transgressing racial boundaries, the parents' "sinfulness" casts mixed race children as necessarily a "problem" that remains "unsolved." Their status as children who are therefore innocent is superseded by their status as racially mixed subjects who are therefore tainted.

Although Lui contends "these interracial couples represented the beginnings of a working-class family life for the city's Chinese immigrant community," the white mothers of these children were depicted as "morally deviant" (147). In *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), Jacob Riis reveals that "a few, a very few, Chinese merchants have wives of their own color" but are rather "of a different stock that comes closer home." These women, he suggests, end up in Chinatown because they have fallen victim to the peculiarly exotic vice of opium use. He provides the description:

From the teeming tenements to the right and left of it come the white slaves of its dens of vice and their infernal drug, that have infused into the "Bloody Sixth" Ward a subtler poison than ever the stale-beer dives knew, or the "sudden death" of the Old Brewery. There are houses, dozens of them, in Mott and Pell Streets, that are literally jammed, from the "joint" in the cellar to the attic, with

these hapless victims of a passion which, once acquired, demands the sacrifice of every instinct of decency to its insatiate desire. (92)

Such depictions of the “immoral” character of the white women in Chinatown were common to these virtually pornographic exposés of Chinatown life that appeared at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Despite the evidence drawn from marriage and baptism records suggesting these couples frequently reflected conventional American attitudes toward family life for the time, the overarching narrative about these relationships was that they were symptomatic of some variety of moral decay, whether it be prostitution, drug addiction, sexual slavery, or the like.

Chinatown’s association with this pejorative construction of mixed race children, who are repeatedly cast as a “problem,” thus stems from the supposed failings of their families of origin. Higher class monoracial Chinese families were seen as superior to racially mixed ones according to Liu, partial whiteness was viewed as more sinister than being monoracially Asian (147). Liu writes:

If women were seen as the chief instrument for their children’s socialization, then it would logically follow that dissolute women were incapable of proper child rearing. The depiction of interracial relationships, and these white wives as morally deviant, thus supported the popular belief that proper home life where children were nurtured would be nonexistent” (147).

Insofar as traditional gender roles designate women as having the primary responsibility for the physical and moral well-being of their children, the women were presumed to have already demonstrated their deficiency by their willingness to miscegenate. Accordingly, the whiteness of these women seems to actually make their supposed failure as mothers all the more evident.

Given the scandalizing accounts of the mixed race families of Chinatown produced for consumption by mainstream audiences, it is unsurprising that mixed race writers saw fit to address these representations. At the end of the 19th century, Sui Sin Far, an early mixed race writer, wrote an article “Half-Chinese Children: Those of American Mothers and Chinese Fathers,” describing the mixed race children of Chinatown:

Still, the blighting atmosphere of Chinatown and its vicinity, the sneers and taunting words which are their birthright, the superstitions of their fathers and the careless, indifferent lives (with some exception) of the mothers, do not prevent these children from developing and becoming as fine a lot as a globe trotter could wish to see. (187-8).

Far’s discussion to some degree reiterates the commonplace stereotypes about the parents of mixed race children, citing Chinese paternal irrationality and white maternal callousness, but she nonetheless attempts to recuperate the potential worthiness of the children. Certainly, in her characterization of the parents, Far may have felt pressure to placate the demands of an editor or cater to the

appetites of her readers in order to make her case redeeming the mixed race children. Additionally, as a racially mixed Chinese American herself, Far likely sensed the necessity of demonstrating her comprehension of mainstream attitudes in order to continue to ensure a platform from which to speak during such a period of marked anti-Chinese sentiment.

Though set in Shanghai, Chang's *Frontiers of Love* also makes reference to New York's Chinatown, giving it a somewhat disapproving nod. When Sylvia was twelve, she traveled to the U.S. with her mother, and while in America, Sylvia longs for China and thinks Chinatown is a "ghetto begging tourists to inspect its shame" (49-50). Applying the term "ghetto" to Chinatown is almost certainly meant to draw a parallel for the mid-century English-speaking reader between American racism and the atrocities recently witnessed in Europe, including the creation of Jewish ghettos. The novel thereby discounts the notion that racial segregation is a choice made by the minority subject and implies that even where minorities have the legal right to move outside of ethnic enclaves, they often remain within those boundaries because they are not otherwise socially accepted. While on the surface young Sylvia's thinking suggests the desire to distance herself from Chinatown, it also reveals some understanding of the complexity of the relations that led to the ethnic enclave's formation.

Nuclear Chinatown

Characterizing Chinatown as a place which "begs tourists to inspect its shame" again hints at an association with licentiousness. But the phrase is

further suggestive of the common belief that Chinatown is at once wantonly permeable and yet mysteriously secretive. To fully illustrate this, I turn briefly to a crucial Asian American novel, Luis Chu's *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961), in which the permeability of Chinatown helps to give rise to the text's central conflict. In the novel, newlyweds Ben Loy and Mei Oi are in a strained marriage due to Ben Loy's impotence and Mei Oi's eventual affair. Various family and community members continually express concern for the couple's welfare, which is interpenetrated with the welfare of the broader community.

The couple's marriage, which was arranged to begin with, is not treated as discrete from the interests of the Chinatown community. Ruth Hsaio provides a useful analysis of this aspect of the text:

The intricate power structure of family associations and tongs still rules supreme in the insulated Chinatown. Its grip is relentless, its judgement swift, and its power unyielding. Under this system, the ruling patriarchs mete out rewards and punishments. (161)

The patriarchal authority of the father within the triadic family is undercut by the expanded familial system existing in Chinatown. Moreover, the novel suggests it is the porousness of the home relative to the larger community that is the true source of Ben Loy and Mei Oi's troubles. During a heatwave one day, Mei Oi discovers that leaving the entryway door to her and Ben Loy's apartment is the only way to create enough airflow to cool the apartment and thus makes a habit of leaving the front door open. "She had been using this resourceful cooling

system for about a week,” the novel recounts, “when one day, as she was sitting thus in the doorway, she noticed someone coming up the stairs” (92). The figure turns out to be the local philanderer, Ah Song, with whom Mei Oi eventually begins an affair. The literal permeability of Ben Loy and Mei Oi’s home, with its door frequently ajar, creates the conditions for her adulterous affair.

Even Ben Loy’s impotence, another contributing factor to their marital troubles, is linked to the lack of a distinct home sphere. Their lives are much improved after separating themselves from the Chinatown community and moving across the country to San Francisco:

[Ben Loy] liked San Francisco. With the passing of each day, the New York chapter of his life was pushed further back in his memory. New York represented parental supervision and the reckless mistakes of youth. Now all was being replaced by new surroundings and new attitudes. The proverbial parental shackle had been cut. For the first time Ben Loy knew and enjoyed emancipation. New frontiers, new people, new times, new ideas unfolded. He had come to a new golden mountain. (245-6)

It is in San Francisco, emancipated from the “proverbial parental shackle,” where Ben Loy “eats a bowl of tea,” an herbal remedy for impotence, and regains his sexual functioning. This return of Ben Loy’s patriarchal power signified by the rectification of his impotence is thereby linked to his disentanglement from the

Chinatown community. The couple's postcoital afterglow emphasizes the young family's separation, as is illustrated in the following description:

For this hour, all creation existed solely for them. Their bed was the universe, the stars, the sun, the moon, the air, heavens and earth. The room was incandescent . . .

A long while later, the baby whimpered from the crib (250).

Separation from the community is here cast as the necessary precondition for the family's consummate autonomy. The Chinatown community registers as a burden rather than a resource, and not until the family is sequestered are they able to lay claim to "all creation," becoming masters of their own small universe. Hsiao persuasively argues, "Not only does the novel restore the ruffled old-order social hierarchy, but it also suggests the birth of new age patriarchy" (157). This new patriarchy is one that requires that Ben Loy establish himself as the head of his own distinct nuclear family unit.

Ben Loy and Mei Oi's independence from the larger New York Chinatown community is signaled when the couple does not invite their fathers to their infant son's haircutting ceremony, which would be considered a very serious slight. The novel then closes with Mei whispering, "We must invite Lao Yair to our second haircut party!" To which Ben Loy responds, "Yes," [. . .] "We won't forget your father, too!" (250). By closing the narrative with a conversation in which the couple feels newly empowered to select who is given access to their now more

narrowly defined family, the text intimates the imperviousness of the nuclear family formation.

Chu's text's advocacy of the nuclear family model is hardly racially neutral, especially during this period in American history. As part of Cold War containment policy, the mid-century American investment in the nuclear family, Elaine Tyler May suggests, was overtly antagonistic to ethnic ties as popular culture was "filled with stories about young adults who shifted their allegiance from old ethnic ties to the new nuclear family ideal" (28). Thus the ascendance of the nuclear family signals not only a change in family structure but also a rejection of ethnic family ties. This shift can be further illuminated by Fanon's analysis of race and the normative family:

The white family is the agent of a certain system. The society is indeed the sum of all the families in it. The family is an institution that refigures a broader institution: the social or national group. Both turn on the same axes. The white family is the workshop in which one is shaped and trained for life in society" (149).

He further argues that the Antillean has "to choose between his family and European society; in other words, the individual who climbs up into society—white and civilized—tends to reject his family—black and savage—on the plane of imagination" and "the family structure is cast back into the id" (149). Fanon's comments expose how practices construed as social are in fact elaborations on a hierarchical organization of races perceived as biological.

In short, the Ben Loy, Mei Oi, and their son together form a triadic family, and this family, importantly, cannot be troubled by unwieldy obligations demanded by complex extended familial structures. As such, they function to signify the novel's investment in the possibility of minority subjects to transcend race by adhering to "proper" familial structure.

Making Families/Signaling Allegiance

In *Face*, the pressure to conform to the nuclear family ideal is registered in Maibelle's concerns over her difficulty forming a sustained attachment to a man. As an adult, Maibelle has already "escaped" Chinatown but gets little relief from her self-imposed exile and finds herself plagued by nightmares that have launched her into a state of perpetual flight both literally and figuratively. While attempting to understand this persistent urge to flee, she focuses her attention on her inability to maintain a relationship with a man, though she is noticeably without sustained relationships with persons of any gender. Conventional expectations dictate that she should "settle down," adopting a respectable vocation and becoming a wife and mother. Indeed, the text itself is arguably burdened by such demands. In his analysis of marriage in fiction, Joseph Allen Boone suggests the "history of the English-language novel cannot really be separated from the history of the romantic wedlock ideal" (65). He offers the following analysis:

Because in female variations of the [bildungsroman] the climactic event of marriage confers on the heroine her entire personal

identity (as wife) as well as her social “vocation” (as mother), the growth of the female protagonist has come to be seen as synonymous with the action of courtship. (76)

Although *Face* does not follow the contours of the classical bildungsroman, much can be illuminated by examining it with an eye for the form. If *Frontiers of Love* is, as Sandra Baringer argues, a female bildungsroman, then *Face* is an inverted one. At the novel’s opening, Maibelle has long since left her family home, but rather than having taken a linear journey toward socially sanctioned maturity, she has spent the last several years wandering in order to avoid addressing problems that stem from her adolescence. Her occupation as a flight attendant underscores this apparent arrested development, as she crisscrosses the nation without an ultimate destination and becomes further and further removed from those living below. As a flight attendant, Maibelle is in a state of constant motion, but there is no teleological progress. Rather, she feels trapped in compulsory motion, a slave to Newton’s first law.

In reading through the lens of the traditional female bildungsroman, there is a danger of appearing to accept its values uncritically and judge the actions of the protagonist accordingly. But, as I plan to show in my analysis, not only do those values haunt the text and its protagonist, but the text also frequently invites critical engagement with the conventions of the form.

Maibelle’s adolescence is refracted through her (often partial) memories, bodily sensations, and frequent dreams. After a couple of in-flight close calls,

Maibelle quits her job as a flight attendant based out of California and decides to return home to New York City. During this trip, she heads both east and inward in hopes of uncovering the source of her nightmares and nomadic urges. Going home does unveil some hidden truths of Maibelle's past. Sometime after returning with great trepidation to Chinatown, her first home neighborhood in New York City, Mai slowly recalls the terrifying memory of being assaulted there many years before as a teenager. When fourteen years old, Maibelle returns to Chinatown with the aim of photographing her old stomping grounds and visiting Lao Li, a substitute grandfather who ran a curio shop where Maibelle frequently spent time as a child learning Chinese traditions and writing. During this return visit, she encounters a sixteen-year-old boy she remembers from years past. Under the pretense of picking up a friend, the teenage boy lures her into an abandoned apartment where four of his accomplices lie in wait. Maibelle is then repeatedly raped.

Not surprisingly, this trauma affects Maibelle's adult relationships. She has brief liaisons with men, frequently strangers. In her own telling, she "graze[s] crops of men in truck stops" (15). Jed Moffit, a white aspiring artist, and creator of sad lava-lamp-like sculptures, is Maibelle's latest acquisition. She describes their first sexual encounter as follows: "The aggressor, I granted him neither choice nor comment. I had demanded this entry, forced my way in, and now took him by surprise" (18-19). Maibelle believes her ability to survive these brief encounters with men to be evidence that she "would not, would never, be plowed under"

(190). Maibelle sees herself the aggressor who hopes to “push through.” She thinks, “I will feel him with me, beside me, in me [. . .] I will feel him love me.” The encounter with Jed, like all of her encounters with men, “erased all sensation of touch.” Though this is not—to be clear—a rape scene, Maibelle employs rape as a metaphor for understanding these sexual exchanges and even offers up the delusional thinking that she can force Jed to love her. Although Maibelle is not particularly attached to Jed, he does, for all his mediocrity, offer her something invaluable: sleep without nightmares. She reveals, “I never had bad dreams the nights I stayed with Jed” (19). If little else, Jed is a masculine template on which she can rewrite the trauma of her rape as a scenario where she dominates, taking him by force and rendering him silent.

Maibelle, perhaps rightfully, sees her detachment as a sign of her own failed development, and this sentiment is echoed by her ambitious and austere elegant white mother who upon learning that she has quit flying exclaims, “At last, you’ve come to your senses. I’m so glad, Maibelle. So glad!” (29). Maibelle follows a similar inward path in her attempt to achieve psychological wholeness that Sylvia initially takes in *The Frontiers of Love*. Maibelle’s “escape” to the west coast as a flight attendant was precipitated by the treatment of a psychotherapist, Dr. Elsa Gertz, who offers up the pat explanation that all her problems lie with her family from whom she must “cut off all ties” (123). Yet we learn that Maibelle’s mother had long expressed her opposition to psychoanalysis. At only nine years of age, a social worker had explained to Maibelle’s mother that “she [Maibelle’s

mother] was having difficulty with multiplication because she was in love with her father and wanted to kill her mother” (121). As a result, her mother “took revenge” by sharing with Maibelle “tabloid stories about patient seductions” and “perfectly sane women whose lunatic therapists had locked them into asylums for years” (121-2). Maibelle’s mother launches her attack on psychoanalysis by referencing tabloid stories suggestive of its collusion with patriarchy in its pathologization of women. Her comments further discount the role of the triadic family formation, implicitly monoracial, in determining the psychological health of the female child.

Despite her mother’s protestations, Maibelle follows Dr. Gertz’ advice, explaining how the “invitation to implicate [her] parents was “all too tempting” (123). Becoming a prodigal daughter, Maibelle chooses the aforementioned employment as a flight attendant that allows her to avoid contact with her family for the following five years. Yet, as her mother’s rendering of Freud would anticipate, separating from her family offers none of the healing promised by her psychotherapist. Maibelle reveals, “I did not learn to fly freely or fearlessly.” Instead, she finds herself clinging to “one anonymous man after another” (24). Clearly, her escape from her family yielded few if any clues to Maibelle’s troubles, but she continues to follow the same logic that first prompted her to flee from her family and now leads her once again back home.

Much like Sylvia in *Frontiers of Love*, Maibelle makes little progress guided by the logic of psychoanalysis; nonetheless, she persists in looking

inward toward the roots of her familial relationships in an effort to uncover the truth of her past. Of course, such psychoanalytic introspection requires an examination of the inner workings of the family, implicitly nuclear, where the psyche is formed. Failing to find there the issue that lies at the root of her troubles, Maibelle considers whether genetics played a role in her troubles. She observes, "Now, looking from my fanatical sister to my feckless brother, my hypercompetent mother to my muted father, I wondered for the first time whether there could be more to my madness than bad dreams." She believes "some genetic common denominator" must be at the root of her problems (37). It is precisely the psychoanalytic emphasis on an interiority leading back to the family which circumscribes the territory in which answers might be unearthed. Accordingly, even when this psychological introspection yields no answers, Maibelle continues to concentrate her investigation on her family who she believes is the necessary source of her nightmares. In the absence of a psychological problem to be located in the family, she seeks out a possible genetic one rather than considering sources of other extra-familial distress. This move from psychology to genetics enacts a contemporary version of Freud's own linking of psychology to biology and demonstrates the degree to which the classic psychoanalytic model inhibits an examination of larger social and historical pressures on the individual psyche.

According to traditional concepts of gender and family, the evidence that Maibelle has finally overcome her difficulties would be in her ability to align

herself with a man. Such an alliance gains even greater significance in light of the fact that she is mixed race and her choice of marriage partner can be read as a sign of her politico-racial allegiances. From this interest flows the question of what direction such intermixing will take: deracination or an elaboration of minority identification.

In the past, mixed race people were frequently seen as inimical to white purity and national wholeness. In this reading, mixed race people are a particularly insidious threat because they represent the possibility of mongrelization that could go undetected due to ambiguous racial physiognomy or the ability to “pass.” But more recently in the culture at large, mixed race people are constructed as demonstrating American inclusiveness such that they are registered as non-white and yet “raceless.” The obverse reading of this claim to racelessness and inclusiveness is the notion described earlier that mixed race people threaten to dilute the political power of monoracial minority groups and thus upend the possibility of progress made through more familiar monoracial identity politics. Maibelle’s love life becomes the scene in which the debate over how to interpret this ostensible “new race” within the context of American national identity is dramatized. Maibelle’s nickname “Maibe” further suggests this uncertainty surrounding her identity.

Choosing a partner from one group or the other could be read to signal whether or not the growing number of mixed race people should count as members of a monoracial minority group or a raceless “new people.” Lost in this

debate is the possibility of mixed race as a legitimate category of racial (as opposed to post-racial) identification. This resistance to understanding mixed race as such most certainly stems from its nonconformity to commonplace conceptions of race. Vertical linear continuity through generations is a key component of biologically- as well as sociologically-based ideas of race insofar as both indicate a passing on through generations of genetic material and/or cultural values and practices. This is not to suggest that other racial categories are natural or stable; they are, of course, forged and contingent. But mixed race identity lacks the veneer of the “the real” that adheres to monoracial categories. While monoracial minorities have frequently been forced to do battle with meanings of race that, while contextual and mutable, are treated as ahistorical and immutable, mixed race at present is marked by a perceived excess of mutability that seemingly makes it applicable to nearly anyone who wants to claim it and renders it useless as a traditionally defined racial category or a legitimate position from which to speak. Simultaneously, mixed race people are frequently seen as too few in numbers to constitute a meaningful racial group despite the interest in the growing number of people who identify as being of more than one race. Mixed race is accordingly plagued by the contradictory beliefs that it is either a category defined too broadly to be useful or inhabited too sparsely to be relevant. Yet in the face of these objections, what remains undeniable is that the pronounced anxiety circulating around miscegenation in American history and culture has produced innumerable attempts to define, to

control, to discourage, and, to some extent more recently, to encourage race mixing. This history produces real effects on the subjects around whom such anxiety circulates. Race mixing has functioned and continues to function as a key signifier of American national regress or progress depending on the racial attitudes of the immediate context.

The false choice between Asian American masculinity and white masculinity is figured in two of Maibelle's male childhood friends. She reveals, "I was a child when I posed Tai and Johnny Madison as adversaries." Notably, Maibelle gave the "winning hand" to Johnny, her blonde-haired, blue-eyed childhood friend who she saw when visiting her mid-western grandparents during the summer months. (232). Thus Maibelle's faith, however wavering, is in white masculinity. Her memories of Johnny evoke a sense of hope and peace, rare feelings for Maibelle. Further underscoring Johnny's connection with these feelings, one of Maibelle's dreams has Johnny offering her a dove in each hand. Such avian images abound in the text and provide a useful index for Maibelle's feelings about the people around her. For example, elsewhere she refers to her brother as "wounded bird" and repeatedly discusses her father's disapproving "clucking" (59; 289). Maibelle further recalls a "Chinatown chicken" that could be found at the arcade her brother frequented when they were children. Kept in a revamped popcorn machine, it provided gruesome entertainment when, for the cost of a quarter, an electric current was unleashed under the bird's feet, making it dance, "leaping and crazily flapping its wings." The chicken's "particular identity

changed over the years” but it “always had the same mangy feathers, half a tail, and eyes glazed over with a thick white film” (125). The bird functions as a parallel for how the inhabitants of Chinatown must mask their “particular identities” in order to trade on the performance of “Chineseness” as objects of a colonizing gaze. In fact, when she finally returns with Tai to photograph Chinatown’s long-time residents, she is surprised by their vibrancy and notes that among the old-timers there “is not a single pair of white eyes.” She is surprised to discover they are unlike the Chinatown chicken, eyes covered with “thick white film,” who is seen but not seeing (150). The flightless sightless bird, trapped in Chinatown to be tortured by curious onlookers, is for Maibelle the antithesis of Johnny’s doves--just as she imagines Chinatown to be the antithesis of mainstream America. As a Chinatown local, Tai just “isn’t right”; he’s “not blonde” and “not Johnny” (285). Maibelle proves initially unable to imagine Tai, a Chinese American, as a love interest even though she is drawn to him and “lingers on him” (232).

Clearly, Maibelle’s favored type is blonde and conventionally handsome. These fair-haired men are how she imagines Johnny, who as a teenager committed suicide by jumping from the top of a silo, would have been if he had survived into adulthood. Her idealization of Johnny stands in contradiction to the admonitions she received about heterosexual alliances many years prior. Lao Li, her grandfatherly friend from Chinatown, had long ago told her that if she marries a Chinese man she will “have almost Chinese children” (193). Essentially, Li

suggests she could choose to follow the example of one of two female legends he recounts. She can choose to become either the “White Witch,” a white woman who entangles a Chinese man in a relationship only to carelessly abandon him and their children, or a “Jade Maiden,” an immortal who comes to earth and falls in love with a mortal man but obediently marries another immortal, “Chu the Ancient, Elder Immortal of Eternal Joy,” because her father had promised him anything he wished as a reward for returning a favored steed that had run away. Chu the Ancient later reveals he needed to marry her so she would avoid being “defiled by mortal men” (200). Both the White Witch and the Jade Maiden transgress the boundaries of acceptable exogamy, participating in an alliance too far outside their social group, but the White Witch does so with impunity while the Jade Maiden learns the lesson of subordination and restores the order of things by returning to paradise. Li explains, “If your babies grow up and marry Chinese, spell of white witch is broken.” He tells her, “That is moral of story for you.” (193) The White Witch shows no allegiance to her Chinese family, and should Maibelle evidence the same lack of allegiance, she aligns herself with the White Witch and thus with whiteness more broadly. From Li’s perspective, Maibelle needs to affirm her (and her father’s) Chinese identity by taking her place within what he considers to be an endogamous exchange between her father and another Chinese man. These two narratives animate an important and familiar difficulty faced by Asian American and other minority women, where feminine independence is coded as white or antithetical to their minority identity.

Gendered progress and ethnic progress are then positioned as mutually exclusive goals.

In fact, Maibelle does seem to identify with whiteness as a child. This notion is evidenced in her recollection of girlhood fantasies:

I suspect all young girls daydream about their future families, and I was no exception. I was going to have two boys and two girls, all about two years apart. But in spite of the glaring example of my own American grandmother and her Chinese husband, not to mention my American mother and her *half*-Chinese husband, in spite—or perhaps because—of living in Chinatown, I automatically assumed that white girls do not wed Chinese men. (193)

In this passage, the slippage between “American” and “white” intimates a problematic linkage in Maibelle’s thinking between American national identity and white racialization.

That Maibelle cannot conceive of a white woman marrying a Chinese man despite examples to the contrary in her own family underscores the degree to which she has adopted dominant attitudes regarding “proper” heterosexual marriage. Surprised by the notion that she should marry a Chinese man, Maibelle implicitly reveals her own identification as one of the “white girls” who “do not wed Chinese men” even though she would be considered mixed rather than white in mainstream American conceptions of race (where the term “white” generally signals monoracial heritage). Certainly, the years she spent in

Chinatown among monoracial Asian Americans provide an understandable context for her identification as white, but this identification continues into adulthood long after she has left Chinatown. As an adult, she keeps “trying to substitute whirling images of Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire” for her recurring nightmares (21). Maibelle attempts to replace the nightmares of sexual assault that torment her with images of idealized heterosexuality, and though Li’s stories privilege marriage to Chinese men, idealized heterosexuality is, for Maibelle, monoracially white.

Maibelle’s seemingly uncritical acceptance of idealized monoracial heterosexuality proves useful in explaining her strained relationship with her mother. Though Maibelle signals her identification with whiteness, that identification does not extend to her white mother. To some degree, this difficulty may be attributed to her mother’s overly exacting execution of proper femininity of the sort that Maibelle wishes to escape, but there is also a profound mistrust Maibelle feels toward her mother. Maibelle’s mother curates an art collection for a gallery owned by a man provocatively named Foucault. Based on very little information (seeing her mother get into a car with Foucault), she believes her mother to be having an affair, and later confesses that all she “could see was [her] mother’s deceit” (177). When Foucault dies unexpectedly, Maibelle attempts to express sympathy for her mother by saying, “[T]hat gallery was your life.” Taken aback by the assertion, Maibelle’s mother responds, “That’s really what you think? [. . .] Your father was my life, Maibelle. Everything I have ever done

has been for him” (295). Prior to this exchange, Maibelle always saw her mother’s motivations as suspect, believing her to be merely using her father, who had been a famous photojournalist, to fulfill her own aspirations in the art world. She cannot conceive of her white mother’s alliance with her Chinese father to be anything other than highly vexed and thus unreliable--not unlike the White Witch of Li’s stories. Maibelle’s difficulty in seeing her mother’s affection for her father as genuine is most certainly shaped by Maibelle’s belief that a true alliance can only be built on a foundation of shared racial identity.

Maibelle’s white identification helps explain her extremely negative reaction to intimacy with Tai. She describes, “I sniff the air around him. Not sandalwood but fish. A deep, briny silt” [...] “I can’t breathe through the stink of this man. This lover. I can’t breathe” (285). She is inexplicably repulsed by Tai. As is later revealed, her reaction arises from the way the smell evokes memories of the rape she experienced years prior. After the rape she was forced into a “garbage bag that was slimy and stank of the fishmonger’s trash they must have emptied out of it” (324). Later she admits her “fear of Tai was as irrational as [her] terror of Chinatown had proven to be” (308). But the ease with which she is able to racialize the rape, viewing all Asian men as potential rapists, begins with a primary identification with whiteness evidenced well before the rape occurred. Insofar as Maibelle at this point feels that no white woman would willfully engage in a sexual relationship with an Asian American man, any such relationship can only be rendered in her mind as a form of rape. For Maibelle, a relationship with

Tai, indeed with any Asian man, constitutes an unsanctioned exogamous exchange.

Maibelle's dreams about Johnny further underscore her apparent association between idealized heterosexuality and whiteness. Despite Lao Li's warnings against white identification, Maibelle explains how her "cherished dreams about Johnny" are the "only sure antidote to nightmare" (58). Johnny is even imbued with Christ-like attributes in her dreams. One such dream draws a rather apparent parallel between Jesus and Johnny:

He slows to walk, but doesn't stop at the shore. He walks on water [. . .] "Stay with me" he calls. 'Don't look back! You can marry me in your dreams.' [. . .] I run until the breath from behind pours through me, burning my throat and crushing my chest. I let it pull me down. (229)

In the dream, Maibelle's position parallels that of Peter at the Sea of Galilee described in Matthew 14: 25-31 (King James Version). "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid," Jesus commands the disciples. But when beckoned to walk on the water to meet Jesus, Peter is, quite rationally, filled with fear and thereby begins to sink, prompting the famous admonition: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Like Peter in the biblical story, Maibelle sinks into the water when distracted by the storm of problems that surround her rather than focusing on her "savior."

From what, though, must Maibelle be saved? The most obvious answer-- and the answer provided by Maibelle herself--to the above question is that she needs salvation from the nightmares that plague her sleep, and these nightmares have much to do with her suppressed memories of rape. We know that Maibelle seeks to be exorcised of the demons ushered in by the rape she experienced, but the allusion to Peter attends to a more commonplace violence that Maibelle faces as well. Of course, the story of Peter at the Sea of Galilee is most frequently understood as a narrative about the importance of faith in the midst of tribulation, but it is also, and I would argue more importantly in this context, a narrative about the necessity of subordination. The command “be not afraid” precedes Peter’s failure, and the Pauline analogy between the subordination of the believer to Christ and wife to husband should not be lost here. Like Peter, Maibelle’s failure is not only a lack of faith but also of obedience.

Despite being gilded by idealized whiteness, the base metals of the marriage imperative are exposed even in Maibelle’s most cherished dreams about Johnny. Johnny tells her that it is there, in her dreams, that she can marry him, but this dream follows no idyllic marriage plot. Indeed in Johnny’s command, “Don’t look back!,” just before Maibelle is pulled under the water, it is hard to miss the dream’s other biblical allusion to the story of Lot’s wife, who, though her proper name is notably never given in the Bible, has become synonymous with wifely disobedience—we know how things turned out for her. While Maibelle imagines Johnny to be her savior, he cannot rescue her, as he represents that

from which she needs deliverance. Maibelle struggles not only with the trauma of the past rape, but also with the not entirely dissimilar demand that she accept the subordination of her own will to the needs of heterosexual alliance via marriage. Seeking after Johnny, however much she idealizes him, leaves Maibelle sinking beneath the water—a fortune little better than the salted fate of Lot’s wife. Thus her dreams about Johnny and her nightmares about rape both end in violent subordination.

The Jade Maiden’s selfless obedience makes her the ostensibly more admirable feminine figure between the two legends that Li outlined, but Maibelle’s response to the Jade Maiden story further reveals her resistance on some level to its celebration of feminine obedience. “The confusion between heaven and earth, protector, beloved, mortal and god, what the maiden herself really wanted—all the rules seem backward and suspect,” she explains, “and trying to figure them out made my head swim” (200). The Jade Maiden’s return to heaven is made possible only by way of a less-than-heavenly marriage to an old man, albeit an immortal one. Maibelle asks the question that the tale itself disregards: what does the maiden want? The question punctuates the myth’s erasure of feminine desire.

Of note is the marked effect the legend has on Maibelle after having watched a public theater company’s staging of it in Chinatown. Significantly, Tai played the role of Lao Chu, the elderly immortal, and dedicates its performance

to Maibelle, whose name, he reminds her, translates to “little sister of Jade” or Jade Maiden. After the play, Maibelle imagines feeling “breathing on the back of [her] neck” and the sensation of a “hand spread ready to clap over [her] mouth” causing her to have a “surge of panic” (200). In short, she slips into a waking nightmare. Maibelle’s body apparently registers what her conscious mind can not: the myth of the Jade Maiden is a narrative celebrating the erasure of feminine will in favor of the established patriarchal order. The Jade Maiden is charged with re-establishing boundaries between heaven and earth by demonstrating her allegiance to her heavenly home despite having fallen in love with a mortal.

The myth of the Jade Maiden suggests feminine allegiance is expressed in different terms than masculine allegiance. Indeed, women’s ability to demonstrate allegiance, defined as suppression of the individual will in favor of the good of the larger social group, is very much drawn into question by this narrative of feminine obedience. “The work of civilization,” Freud tells us, “has become increasingly the business of men, it confronts them with ever more difficult tasks and compels them to carry out instinctual sublimations of which women are little capable.” (745). From this viewpoint, women, belonging properly to the domestic sphere, do not—or rather cannot—rise above sexual/familial allegiance to achieve the level of moral understanding required by masculine forms of allegiance which bond them to society writ large.

Maibelle is presented with limited options for expressing racial allegiance. A dichotomy of assimilation versus cultural nationalism is figured in Li and Maibelle's father. Lao Li becomes increasingly militant in his cultural nationalism and encourages the formation of the gang that eventually raped Maibelle. Being racially mixed and married to a white American woman, Maibelle's father's allegiance to the Chinese American community is, at least according to Li's strict cultural nationalist paradigm, already suspect. Maibelle's father's attempts to suppress his family story and hide his body of work as a photojournalist in China during World War II might further suggest pro-assimilation mindset that seeks to deny history. The polarities of extreme cultural nationalism versus assimilation animate the following scene in which Maibelle is caught visiting with Li against her father's will:

We formed a triangle the way we were standing. Li was staring at my father, my father at me. I looked back and forth. Only then did I realize that Dad might not know Li and I were friends. And then I remembered I was disobeying him by being here. (222)

Caught between Li and her father, Maibelle here functions as that which solidifies the male bonds between her father and Li. By maintaining her friendship with Lao Li, she also maintains the link between her father and the past he would prefer to forget. In fact, Maibelle briefly believes that Li might be her true grandfather because her father has so carefully obscured his past and her family's history is so suffused with mysterious entanglements. "Far from rejecting his past" Li had

brought it with him and “had resurrected it here.” In contrast, her father “had only pieces of celluloid to carry, but for him even that was too much” (187). Even the decision to live in Chinatown, which Maibelle had always assumed was her father’s, later proves to have actually been her mother’s. Living in Chinatown kept their family in contact with others who had immigrated from China, which would trouble her father’s attempts to sheer away the past. Depending on whether Maibelle chooses a white partner or an Asian American one, her heterosexual alliances can either enable or disable her father’s assimilationist hopes. Lao Li, aligned with cultural nationalist thinking, has previously asserted his belief that it is Maibelle’s responsibility to break the curse of the White Witch by marrying a Chinese man. Both positions clearly retain an investment in Asian American women as the site on which their patriarchal political aspirations are enacted.

Horizontal Identifications

Greater than a matter of individual choice, Maibelle’s selection of partner registers the meaning not only of Asian American womanhood but also of mixed race in America. Though urged to choose between monoracial categories of either Asian American or white by way of romantic entanglement with a man, Maibelle eventually elects instead to identify with other mixed race people. For example, when visiting a cemetery with Tai, they run into a mentally-ill homeless man who proclaims “You survive” (279). Uncertain of what this means or who he is, Maibelle is frightened and can only think this unknown man both “looked

familiar” and “felt familiar” (323). It’s not until perusing old photos with her father that she learns the man is her racially mixed uncle, Winston Chang, and recalls that he had so many years’ prior both kept her rapists from killing her and compelled her not to report the rape. She thinks: “My father’s younger brother. My uncle. He had known where we lived. He hadn’t lied. He had threatened me with the truth. And saved my life” (349). Shortly after learning the mysterious man is her uncle, her father presents her with a recent newspaper clipping stating “The body of an Amerasian male washed ashore [. . .] drowned in an apparent suicide” (349). Learning about Winston suddenly makes Maibelle feel as though water is also “closing over [her] head,” much like the sensation she feels during her nightmares (349). Maibelle empathizes with her uncle’s sad fate. As two drowning victims, one literal and one figurative, Winston and Maibelle are similarly submerged under conventional notions of race.

In drawing this parallel between herself and her uncle, Maibelle finally identifies neither with the Jade Maiden nor with the White Witch. Instead, she identifies with the children of the White Witch. These “stolen children were forced to remain forever between earth and sky” (106). By identifying with them, Maibelle asserts an allegiance born of shared exclusion (103). Similarly, when Maibelle learns that her name came is a portmanteau from the names of her two mixed race paternal aunts, she expresses a simultaneous sense of belonging and liminality:

I'd never even seen a picture of my aunts, and yet I bore their names. That seems to make them a part of me, or vice versa. A fact of my life almost since I was born, yet no one had ever bothered to tell me. It was a minor thing, but it gave me a sense of what an amnesia victim must experience on being told he has a name he doesn't recognize, that total strangers are his dear friends and family. A sense of existing on two planes at once, with no connection between them. (87)

Maibelle identifies with her aunts, seeing them as a "part of" herself that had heretofore been unknown. This identification initiates the feeling of "existing on two planes at once" which mirrors how the White Witch's children are caught "between earth and sky." Carol Roh Spaulding has suggested mixed race subjects function as "go-between people" that are always "negatively defined (neither 'white' nor 'raced')" (98). Maibelle's identification with the children of the White Witch indicates how Maibelle begins to imagine an identity outside of presumptive monoraciality.

Aligning herself with her unmarried mixed race uncle and aunts proves crucial to Maibelle's psychological improvement and reveals an unexplored pathway for identification that she had previously been unable to imagine. In "Tales of the Avunculate," Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick demonstrates how a consideration of horizontal relationships opens up the possibility for alternate family formations outside of the marriage imperative and the nuclear family:

But if having grandparents means perceiving your parents as somebody's children, then having aunts and uncles, even the most conventional of aunts and uncles, means perceiving your parents as somebody's sibs—not, that is, as alternately abject and omnipotent links in a chain of compulsion and replication that leads inevitably to you; but rather as elements in a varied, contingent, recalcitrant but re-forming seriality, as people who could have demonstrably could have turned out very differently—indeed as people who, in the differing, refractive relations among their own generation, can be seen already to have done so. (63)

Sedgwick's analysis makes apparent how vertical familial relationships eclipse horizontal ones and how they are given primacy in determining the formation of the subject. She further suggests that repositioning one's focus on horizontal relationships, by, for example, situating parents within a chain of siblings, calls into question the determinacy of direct lineage. This shifted focus opens up a space for alternative subject formations that are not necessarily bound up in notions of heterosexual marriage and reproduction. Prior to Maibelle's identification with her uncle, an identification requiring the horizontal detour Sedgwick discusses, she remains caught between the choices of marrying white versus marrying Asian American—both options leave her subject to the marriage imperative as the ultimate marker of fully developed raced and gendered adulthood. Employing the heterosexual marriage imperative as a means through

which sanctioned feminine identity is established and (presumptively singular) racial identification is affirmed, thus forecloses the possibility of other potentially subversive modes of being Sedgwick describes. Once Maibelle establishes identification with her mixed race bachelor uncle, other possible relationships emerge that are crucial to helping her resolve her deep-seated anxieties.

In many ways, the novel's structure would initially indicate that Maibelle's story ought to end with her marrying Tai and demonstrating monoracial identification through racially endogamous heterosexual partnership. Boone suggests the female bildungsroman's history is inextricably bound up with the "wedlock ideal," which weighs most heavily on women (65). Because the height of feminine achievement is ostensibly reached by becoming a wife and mother, "the growth of the female protagonist has come to be seen as synonymous with the action of courtship" (74). For the female protagonist, it would seem all progress is toward the altar. *Face* thoroughly engages the wedlock ideal in order to challenge it, not only as a gendered sign of development, but also as a sign of racial identification and national belonging.

One important convention of the marriage plot that *Face* employs a variation of is the "double suitor convention." Through this convention, according to Jean E. Kennard, supposed feminine infantilism is illustrated when the female protagonist chooses a suitor and does so badly. The flawed suitor must be replaced by one who functions as a mentor who is able lead her away from her own willful childishness on to the path toward adulthood (cited in Boone, 75). In

Maibelle's case, she has a number of male suitors, but they each function as a type for Johnny, whose literal unavailability—due to his suicide -- is reaffirmed in the transitory nature of her relationships with his derivatives. Tai enters as a paternalistic mentor, not only encouraging her previously abandoned artistic aspirations by convincing her to shoot photos for his ethnographic book on Chinatown but also by coaching her on the meaning of Chinese ethnic identity. After learning from Tai that over a million Chinese had come to Chinatown since she lived there, Maibelle quips, "I knew I wasn't welcome, but I had no idea it was that bad." Tai returns an admonishment: "Problem with round-eyes is they think the universe revolves around them. It would never occur to Chinese to say such a thing. Even joking" (159). Tai acts as Maibelle's instructor in navigating the cultural values Chinatown and its inhabitants even though Maibelle grew up there as well. Maibelle acquiesces to the notion that she "needed an escort" (148). Their relationship becomes increasingly asymmetrical, as Maibelle begins to think of herself as dependent on Tai for instruction and protection.

The apparent end of their relationship, when Maibelle rejects Tai for not approximating Johnny closely enough (he is "not blonde" and "not Johnny"), further follows the conventions of the wedlock ideal in which the suitor is temporarily rejected. As is to be expected, Maibelle and Tai begin to reconcile, but that is where the novel diverges from the marriage plot. In an effort to guide Maibelle to recovery, Tai encourages Maibelle to face her fears and return to the place of the rape. Once there, he reassures her, "You don't have to stay or be

afraid. You're safe, you know? And you can escape any time you need to" (351). As she lifts her camera to shoot the site, Tai says, "I'm here, Maibelle. I love you. You're safe now." Maibelle, who had her lens trained on him "like the crosshairs of a gun" removes Tai from the picture with a "motion to the right" that works "like magic" to remove him from her line of sight (353). Rather than returning a declaration of love for Tai as we might expect given the conventions of the marriage plot, Maibelle quite literally removes Tai from the picture.

Face resists the exogamy imperative, replacing it with another form of alliance. After having removed Tai and thereby symbolically exorcised patriarchal kinship as that which determines feminine mixed race allegiance, Maibelle encounters a child of "about five, with curly black hair and skin the color of cocoa dusted with fine darker freckles." The child lives with her mother and grandmother in the apartment that was once the gang den where Maibelle was raped (354). The little girl's eyes are "not black or even dark brown" but are "flecked with color radiating like a wheel—slivers of gray, amber, green-but deep in the center, as unearthly and hypnotic as a summer pool, they are pure blue" (356). The interplay of colors in the child's eyes suggests racial heterogeneity, and Maibelle does in fact learn she is Chinese Vietnamese with a white American father who her family hopes to locate in the United States. Rather than provide the anticipated ending in which Maibelle is committed to Tai, released from convoluted family entanglements, and able to create a nuclear family, the narrative ends with Maibelle bearing witness to a family made up of three

generations of women. Not a nuclear family, this family unit is simultaneously excessive and deficient by the Oedipal standard, containing within it too many generations and no fathers.

By positioning this wholly female mixed race multigenerational family at the point of Maibelle's psychological healing, the text resists the assimilationist tendency toward reproductive nuclearity evidenced in *Eat a Bowl of Tea*; it also thwarts the usual structure of the female bildungsroman. Further underscoring its resistance to the marriage plot, Maibelle gives her most cherished token of affection, a pendant she and Johnny found as children, not to Tai but to the "strange child, elfin and dark." After Maibelle gives the mixed race child Johnny's heart-shaped locket, the "little girl circles her fingertip over the smooth surface" causing Maibelle to "remember the way Johnny rubbed and rubbed," polishing the locket "until life returned where none had seemed possible." It was "like a phoenix," he said (356). In this instance, the mixed race child is associated with the phoenix, yet another avian image. The phoenix's capability to perform parthenogenesis in perpetuity situates it outside of the teleology of the heterosexual imperative. In the gesture of giving the child Johnny's locket, Maibelle rejects the patriarchal authority she has granted Johnny in her psyche and refuses to allow Tai to supplant him in that position. Instead, she passes the power of regeneration (an "inheritance" passed laterally rather than vertically) on to a young mixed race girl.

Undoubtedly, Maibelle's gift to the child signifies a feminist desire to avoid the marriage imperative. But it also speaks to the difference of mixed race; for in the case of immediately mixed children (those with monoracially identifiable parents from different races), the rigid logic of (monoracial) descent employed by dominant American culture, which relies heavily on the body as a racial signifier, loses interpretive strength when applied to the racially mixed subject. Within this system, the mixed race child's bodily presence is often interpreted as signifying a different race than that of either of the monoracially identifiable parents, and accordingly, the implicit assumption that familial descent and racial descent will necessarily coincide is exposed. *Face* thereby elucidates how the relationship between family and race is typically constituted. According to Kimberly Da Costa's analysis of the multiracial movement, mixed race people's "involvement in multiracial organizations" sought "to make visible relationships that are often hidden to others--those between parents and children who appear racially different" (18). If these relationships between mixed race children and their parents are "hidden," that concealment stems from the way the logic of descent jettisons the possibility of racial difference between biologically related parents and children. In a monoracial family, shared racial identity serves as an analog for a common kinship; the two map onto each other, bolstering one another to support the ostensible "naturalness" of the monoracial family. But in a multiracial family, the bonds of kinship are often understood by mainstream monoracial American society to be menaced by racial difference, which requires constant

explanation and justification. In other words, Liu's text posits mixed race as a rejection—not of racial identification—of the inelastic logic of racial descent.

The marriage imperative occludes alternative family arrangements that are in fact presented to Maibelle a number of times during the novel but are not recognized by her as legitimate family models. Upon moving back to New York City, Maibelle rents an apartment in an all-female building that was formerly occupied by Marge Gramercy, a woman who, like Maibelle, had been a photographer. Traveling the world shooting photos for *National Geographic*, Marge must have had “lovers at home and abroad and many invitations to marriage,” Maibelle believes, “but held out for the man who would not try to mold her, break her, or admire her too deeply, who would simply keep her company in love” (105-6). From the photos Marge had published, Maibelle continues to piece together her story:

When that man failed to materialize, she selected children in villages on all six continents and made it her life's goal to support this global family. These are her children here [. . .] Whether in grief or joy the children all have her eyes--clear, thrilled, hungry for life. But they are too trusting. She crushes this trust like a sweet tender onion until it releases the vulnerability that makes her weep, and only when her tears are streaming does she record what she sees. (106)

Marge's "family" is built through shared emotion rather than through heterosexual marriage that is integrated into a chain of ancestors. Although at one point earlier in the novel Maibelle laments "you can't make substitutions for parents," Maibelle's eventual identification with Marge would indicate those substitutions already exist (117). Maibelle imagines Marge speaking to her and offering the warning, "Stop looking for endings." An ending, according to the spectral Marge, "is only the inevitable conclusion of something that started long ago" (106). Rather than situating "endings" in a privileged position that retroactively sutures past experiences into an ineluctable finality, endings are here little more than evidence that something else "started long ago." Interpreting this guidance in light of Maibelle's uncertain racial identification suggests she ought to unburden herself of the teleological weight of ancestral descent. Maibelle is neither the fulmination of her family's racial aspirations or failures, nor is she responsible to ensure a patriarchal vision of the future by demonstrating monoracial allegiance through the elaboration of kinship systems.

Maibelle ultimately follows Marge's model for forging connection when, in the novel's closing scene, she photographs the mixed race child to whom she gave Johnny's locket. Posing for the camera, the child "smiles shyly, happily" as Maibelle prepares to take her picture. Like Marge, Maibelle uses the camera as a vehicle for connection rather than objectification. Maibelle reports, "I wait until my tears are flowing, and begin to record what I see" (356). In creating a bond with this Amerasian child, Maibelle embraces the varied backgrounds of Asian

American mixed race subjects, which include more than just official family histories organized in a vertical chain of descent; they include histories of colonization, imperialism, militarization, etc.

Face tells the tale of “unwieldy” family arrangements, where extended and fictive kinship ties intermingle and become kaleidoscopic as family histories are suppressed and rediscovered. Rather than deny those complex family relations, seeded in China and continued in the United States, in order to adopt the nuclear model privileged in dominant American culture, the novel instead multiplies the avenues through which families might be created. The text offers up the notion that a shared history as mixed race subjects on the margins of mainstream American society can supplant the bonds implicit in shared ancestral history. Refusing the equation between mixed race and racelessness, *Face* reveals that an absence of heritable mixed race descent does not preclude the promise afforded by a horizontal alliance with a mixed race community.

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Chapter 3

Blood Brothers: Social Contract Theory, Mixed Race, and Fraternal Democracy in Chang-Rae Lee's *Native Speaker*

Chang-Rae Lee's novel *Native Speaker*, published in 1995, has won much praise and has garnered significant critical attention; most of the critical focus remains on how the profession of the central character, Henry Park, speaks to his status as a Korean American man. Henry is a spy, a position which serves as a productive metaphor for his marginalized status as a second generation Asian American, a group whose allegiance to the United States has historically been and continues to be viewed as suspect. Simultaneously inside and outside both mainstream American culture and Korean American culture, Henry would seem to be the ideal candidate for the furtive work required of him as a spy. Furthermore, the desirable characteristics of a spy, being silent, invisible, observant, and duplicitous, map all too well onto the familiar stereotypes of Asian Americans.

A related theme in the discussions of *Native Speaker* is the seeming parallelism between the character of Henry and the author, Chang-Rae Lee. Given that the protagonist is a Korean American spy who informs on a Korean American politician, examining the comparison of a spy informing on "one of his own" and a novelist writing about "one of his own" seems a reasonable line of inquiry. Although setting up a one-to-one correlation between an ethnic writer

and the ethnic protagonist he creates as part of an artistic project risks stepping into essentializing territory, the novel does seem to invite this analogy. Yoonmee Chang, for example, provides an astute discussion linking the role of Park as spy to the role of Chang as an ethnic writer. She describes Henry, whose invisibility as an Asian American enables his ability to silently observe other ethnic minority subjects, as an “ethnic entrepreneur” who “sells his ethnicity as a commodity to be traded for his class gain.” Acting as a spy, Henry must render his observations in written reports, drawing the comparison to ethnographic writing even closer. Accordingly, Chang argues that the “production of knowledge about Asian Americans positions the ethnic producer of knowledge to be a co-ethnic traitor” (147). In a similar vein, Liam Corley asserts that Henry is “figured as a stand-in for writers of biographical and autobiographical Asian American works that can be commodified as ‘simple’ immigrant literature” (73). Ultimately, ethnic writers are compelled to grapple with their “representativeness” whether they choose to or not, and Lee does appear to have decided to engage the question unflinchingly.

Much less critical attention has been paid to Henry’s mixed-raced son, Mitt, who dies tragically in an accident at the age of only seven while roughhousing with some neighborhood boys. Though the reader is not yet aware of this loss, it is suggested almost immediately in the novel’s tone. *Native Speaker* opens cheerlessly with the line: “The day my wife left she gave me a list of who I was” (1). Eventually, we learn that the source of Henry and his white

wife Lelia's estrangement lies in Henry's refusal to process (or perhaps his stoic method of processing) Mitt's untimely passing. Each night Henry replays in his mind the "spontaneous crèche of his death" (104). The text's use of Christic imagery coupling the birth of Jesus with Mitt's tragic death intimates Mitt's importance in the novel. Offering a final reminder of Mitt's absence, the last scene of the novel depicts Henry and Lelia, a speech therapist, bidding farewell to a group of children who are ESL students: "When I embrace them, half pick them up, they are just that size I will forever know, that very weight so wondrous to me, and awful. I tell them I will miss them. They don't quite know how to respond" (349). Though there is relatively little narrative space dedicated to his story, Mitt remains ever-present in Henry's consciousness, as Henry repeatedly conjures his memory.

Though the novel works to keep Mitt present despite his death, he remains under erasure in most discussions of *Native Speaker*. When Mitt is mentioned, he is not typically registered as representative of a mixed race subject. Though several writers make note that he is biracial, it is either treated as an idiosyncratic difference or as symbolic of some other more salient difference. In Tina Chen's discussion, Mitt is a mechanism that initiates Henry's identity crisis. For example, she argues that Henry's dependency on others to "sketch the shape of his identity" becomes "problematic when Lelia demands that he 'be himself' after Mitt suffocates to death" (166). In this reading, Mitt is a tragic lever which threatens to force Henry to dislodge the masks he dons to manage

his relationships both intimate and professional. Other readings view Mitt metaphorically; Amanda Page sees him as representative of the hope for a more inclusive multiracial society since his status as a “grandson of a naturalized Korean American and an American veteran of the Korean War” makes him an apt symbol of reconciliation and unification” (18-19). Liam Corley reads Mitt as the “encapsula[tion]” of Henry and Lelia’s “private history,” which he interprets as mirroring Lelia’s “repressed cultural and racial heterogeneity” (76). In other words, Mitt is not representative of racially mixed identity but is a sign for his white mother’s symbolic racial heterogeneity. While I don’t reject metaphorical interpretations of Mitt outright, it is of interest that so many interpretations of this novel which focus on its engagement with racial identity fail to address Mitt in light of his racial identity: a mixed race person of color. If the text, through Henry, literalizes the metaphor of the Asian American spy, it also, through Mitt, literalizes the invisibility of mixed race subjects, and that invisibility has been repeatedly reinscribed in Mitt’s critical treatment or lack thereof.

Similar to Aimee Liu’s *Face*, Lee’s novel appears at the end of the twentieth century, a moment when mixed race advocacy groups were working toward the recognition of racially mixed people, and gaining inclusion on the United States’ national census functioned as the movement’s lodestone. Then as now, popular constructions of mixed race treated mixed race in a largely celebratory fashion, locating it as a site of potential hopefulness in the U.S., a nation marked by a history of racial violence. A well-known example of this

celebratory treatment of mixed race was seen in *Time* magazine's 1993 special edition on the "New Face of America" which featured the image of a digitally produced mixed-race woman. This image, which Donna Haraway has creatively named "SimEve," suggests a browning of the national body in a way that is apparently meant to ameliorate current tensions that have arisen along the highly fraught white/non-white binary opposition which structures traditional notions of racial classification. As Lauren Berlant has aptly noted, *Time's* construction of the mixed race subject threatens to elide continuing structural inequities based on race that persist in the nation by focusing on the mixed race body as a new sign of a nation whose wholeness no longer frays under the pressure of racial difference (203). Another example, *National Geographic's* October 2013 125th anniversary edition, included the article "The Changing Face of America" by Lise Funderburg that offered images of more than a dozen racially mixed people whose photos were coupled with text describing how the subjects chose to identify on the national census. The universalizing impulse that underwrites the project is evidenced in the photographer's interpretation: "in the end we're all just human beings" (83).

Given the tendency to universalize mixed race subjectivity, it is perhaps unsurprising that some critics have read Mitt in a similar light. "The treatment of Mitt's character," Caroline Rody asserts, "suggests that the individual is precious in an ultimate sense because he/she is so elusive, beyond social categories or ethnic labels, beyond the reach of words" (84). Rody's post-racial idealization

echoes a sentiment intimated by Lelia in the text; Lelia contemplates the possibility that Mitt dies because he “wasn’t all white or all yellow” or because “the world wasn’t ready for him” (129). While there may be some truth in the suggestion that every individual necessarily exceeds categorization, the notion that Mitt’s mixed racial identity creates a taxonomic crisis for the larger society is not supported in *Native Speaker’s* depictions of Mitt. Far from being “beyond the reach of words” Mitt is verbally attacked by his young white suburban friends once they realized he is racially mixed, expeditiously deploying slurs such as “mutt” and “mongrel” (103).

While Lelia’s statement about Mitt’s seeming racial indeterminacy might seem to bolster Rody’s interpretation, Lelia’s comprehension of the nuances of racial and cultural difference is frequently found wanting; the text repeatedly calls her literacy on these matters into question. Seeking to gain a fuller understanding of the woman, known to Henry only by the generic form of address “Ahjuhma” (akin to “ma’am),” who came to live with Henry and his father after his mother’s early death, Lelia decides Ahjuhma’s story needs telling and gracelessly “cornered the woman in the laundry” in an attempt to “communicate with her.” Rather than setting the stage for communication, Lelia’s efforts go badly awry and erupt in violent confrontation. Henry provides the following narration:

I walked by then and saw them standing side by side in the narrow steamy room, Lelia guarding her heap and grittily working as fast as she could, the woman steadily keeping pace with her, not a word or

glance between them. Lelia told me later that the woman actually began nudging her in the side with the fleshy mound of her low-set shoulder, grunting and pushing her out of the room with short steps; Lelia began hockey-checking back with her elbow, trying to hold her position, when by accident she caught her hard on the ear and the woman let out a loud shrill whine that sent them both scampering from the room. (71)

Traumatized by this exchange, Ahjuhma cries “You cat! You nasty American cat!” upon seeing Lelia shortly after the confrontation. Defending his wife, Henry chastises Ahjuhma, causing her to bow “severely before [him] in a way that perhaps no one could anymore” (72). Lelia’s misplaced desire to “rescue” Ahjuhma from obscurity results instead in Ahjuhma’s humiliation, but it is Lelia who is then consoled by Henry. Chasing Lelia back up to their apartment, Henry finds her crying; her “swollen” eyes and “her high cheekbones” cause Henry to muse that she “looked almost Asian, like a certain kind of Russian.” Lelia then declares, “I know who [Ahjuhma] is,” continuing, “She’s an abandoned girl. But all grown up” (73). Despite the obvious failure of her attempt to understand Ahjuhma, Lelia nonetheless insists on having uncovered knowledge of her that Henry, who had grown up in her care, does not have.

Perhaps one might argue that Lelia’s temporary racial transformation when crying that causes her to appear “almost Asian” indicates a symbolic

alignment with Ahjuhma. But the description Henry provides of Lelia early in the novel as she plans a trip abroad tells another story:

And maps. Here was a woman of maps. She had dozens of them, in various scales. Topographic, touristical, some schematic--these last handmade. Through the nights she stood like a field general over the kitchen counter, hands perched on those jutting hipbones, smoking with agitation, assessing points of entry and encampment and escape. Her routes, stenciled in thick, deep blue, embarked inward, toward an uncharted grave center. She had already marked out a score of crosses that seemed to say *You Are Here*. (3)

Lelia, reminiscent of the colonial figure of Conrad's Kurtz, is intent on uncovering the "true" location, conspicuously denoted by a "score of crosses," of the racial other by heading toward an "uncharted grave center." Though Lelia exhibits the feverish certainty of a military general, Henry notices inaccuracies of scale, remarking "there were indications she was misreading the actual size of the islands" so that she would end up "[o]verrunning the land" (3). Leila is consistently both self-assured and unreliable. But her status as a white upper middle class woman and bearer of ostensibly "pure" American culture (her name literally translates from Greek as "well spoken") insulates her from the consequences of her own ignorance. Her mismapping of the land simply enables her domination of it; her misreading of Ajumah's silence allows her to unburden herself of her guilt, even to assume the position of the injured, while Ajumah is left bowing in shame.

Briefly put, Leilia's idealized reading of Mitt's racial identity as neither "yellow" nor "white" constitutes a purposeful repression of Mitt's identity as a multiracial person of color whose lack of purity reifies her seeming racial purity.

What has been missed in these other readings of the novel is the way *Native Speaker* offers a complex critique of this idealized, or I would argue, fetishistic reading of mixed race—arguably the newest form of the U.S. assimilationist narrative: biological assimilation. As mentioned earlier, Henry is tormented by Mitt's death, who dies in what initially seems to be a freak accident while playing with some white children from his neighborhood. Through Henry's exploration of his son's death, the novel forces a return to the question of kinship, revealing the extent to which the metaphor of the national family, particularly in its most ostensibly egalitarian form of fraternal democracy, remains predicated upon a particular idea of the reproductive family. This notion of particular type of national family capable of (re)producing authorized American citizenry reveals, despite national claims to inclusiveness, that the conception of "proper" U.S. citizenship remains etched in constructions of race and blood that precludes the mixed race subject.

Race and Failed Fraternity

The characterization of social contract as fraternal is constructed in direct opposition to patriarchalist conceptions of the citizen's subjection to the state as akin to a father's position of authority over his sons. In his famous "Second Treatise on Government," John Locke argues that paternal power is given by

“nature” while political power is given by “voluntary agreement” and thus “paternal power comes as far short of that of the magistrate as despotic exceeds it; and that absolute dominion, however placed, is so far from being one kind of civil society that it is as inconsistent with it as slavery is with property.” Patriarchalist conceptions of the individual’s natural subordination are thus understood to be at odds with the contractarian construction of the individual who, by virtue of his self-ownership, can freely choose to be subordinated to the state and thereby become a citizen. Carole Pateman’s discussion of the fraternal bond illuminates this opposition:

The standard interpretation of the conflict between the patriarchalists and the contract theorists treat it as a battle over paternal rule and focuses on the irreconcilable differences between two doctrines over the political right of fathers and the natural liberty of sons. The patriarchalists claimed that kings and fathers ruled in exactly the same way (kings were fathers and vice versa); that family and polity were homologous; that sons were born naturally subject to their fathers; and that political authority and obedience and a hierarchy of inequality were natural. The contract theorists rejected all these claims: they argued that paternal and political rule; that family and polity were two different and separate forms of association; that sons were born free and equal and, as adults, were as free as their fathers before them; that political authority and

obligation were conventional and political subjects were civil equals. (*DW* 36)

Through the contract theorists' reconceptualization of the relationship between political leaders and citizens as contractual rather than natural, the importance of descent is replaced by consent. In other words, the reasoning underwriting patriarchalist political thought that assumes political power inheres to those who wield it (as it ostensibly does in the position of father or patriarch) is rejected and replaced by the notion that legitimate political power must be granted by the polity. Accordingly, the construction of democratic brotherhood hinges on the rejection of the patriarchalist dependence upon the ostensibly "natural" patriarchal familial structure and its translation to natural hierarchies of men in the political realm. Despite claims of "natural" liberty under liberal democracy and its rejection of the homology between family and polity, the familial system of the nation nonetheless reemerges in the form of brotherhood. Though this notion of a national fraternity is meant as a refusal of the metaphor of the patriarchal family for the nation, it yet remains imbedded in rituals that hinge on the assumption naturally unequal familial arrangements.

Most obviously, the construction of national bonds as fraternal threatens the place of women in the civil realm, a fact that Pateman explores in her cogent feminist critique of fraternal democracy. Indeed, this essay is very much concerned with discussing the relationship of gender and nation in Lee's text; yet to analyze the narrative of civil society's fraternal order and its explicit desire to

assert the natural equality of men solely along the lines of gender would be to wrongfully suggest that all men have equal access to the furthest reaches of political right. Of course, several critics have called into question liberal political constructions of the citizen, particularly its abstracted nature. For example, Berlant exposes the central importance of abstraction in fulfilling the narrative of the American Dream:

It is a story that addresses the fear of being stuck and reduced to a type, a redemptive story pinning its hope on class mobility. Yet this promise is voiced in the language of unconflicted personhood: to be an American in this view would be to inhabit a secure space liberated from identities and structures that seem to constrain what a person can do in history. (4)

Because the abstract citizen is actually underwritten by an assumption of the universality of the propertied white heterosexual male subject, others who are not “liberated from identities” (such as women, minorities, homosexuals and the poor) are marked as too embodied to be capable of the necessary abstraction required for citizenship. Informed by critiques of abstract citizenship such as Berlant’s, I wish to trace the way different forms of marked embodiment are carefully arranged around both literal and symbolic familial structures prescribed by the controlling U.S. national ideological regime. This essay’s focus on familial structures in the ideology of the nation is, of course, indebted to feminist interrogations of the traditional division between private/familial and

public/political realms. But my interest in the “national family” (both in the sense of the particular type of family able to achieve national status as well as in the sense of the nation-as-family) also stems from the way that it allows for an analysis of the necessary and intimate links not only between “proper” and “failed” citizens but also between differently failed ones. As such, my project is not simply to expose the way in which various embodied identities’ inhabit a similar relation to (i.e. exclusion from) the promise of abstract citizenship but to map the way that they cut across one another in order to preserve the sovereignty of the propertied white male heterosexual citizen-subject, reigning patriarch of the U.S. national family.

In *Native Speaker*, the importance of the bonds of democratic fraternity in maintaining civil right is prominently manifest in the behavior of John Kwang, a Korean American immigrant and a member of an unfortunately small group: visible Asian American political figures. Because Kwang is a candidate in the mayoral elections of New York City, Henry, a corporate spy by trade, is assigned to gather information on him. In doing so, Henry observes Kwang’s agility in fostering those sentiments of brotherhood that underwrite foundational liberal theories of citizenship:

No matter what skin you were, no matter what your opinion of him, when you met him in person you somehow felt that you understood the subtle pressure of his grip, that it said or meant that you were

the faintest brother to him, perhaps distantly removed by
circumstance or blood but a brother nonetheless. (138)

For Henry, Kwang embodies the idealized potential for liberty offered up under fraternal democracy. In such a system, differences, whether they be those of “circumstance” or even of “blood,” are transcended so as to extend familial bonds and thus political right to all those who would seek to be national brothers. Because Kwang is able to bridge the differences that might otherwise inhibit fraternal bonding, Henry invests in him the hope for a different future for Asian America. For example, Henry notes that before Kwang he “had never even conceived of someone like him. A Korean man, of his age, as part of the vernacular.” Kwang was “not just a respectable grocer or dry cleaner or doctor, but a larger public figure who was willing to speak and act outside the tight sphere of his family” (139). In other words, Kwang represents a new possibility for defining Asian American success in the nation, one in which advancement extends beyond the familial sphere and is measured by political empowerment in which Asian Americans are not simply represented but are seen as capable of representing the citizenry more broadly rather than by fulfillment of the model minority myth and membership in the bourgeoisie.

Yet by the end of the novel we learn that, though Kwang seems to have otherwise seamlessly enacted the fraternal rites of citizenship, political right remains decidedly outside of his grasp. Following a scandal in which Kwang is financially linked through the Korean practice of a *ggeh*, an informal system of

dispensing loans to contributing community members, to a number of undocumented immigrants, the political tide turns violently against him. This shift is most frighteningly demonstrated when protesting crowd gathers in front of his home “chant[ing] that they want to kick every last one of them back to where they came from, kick him back with them, let them drown in the ocean with ‘Smuggler Kwang.’” The crowd also carries with it a sign that, in the all too familiar spirit of American nativism, proclaims “AMERICA FOR AMERICANS” and suggests “Asian” and “American” are antithetical terms (333). Such nativistic rhetoric reveals that, regardless of Kwang’s actual legitimacy as a citizen and because of his racialization, the scandal does not simply mark him as a failed political leader but as a failed citizen altogether, estranging him from the national brotherhood. Given Kwang’s apparent mastery of democratic fraternal bonds, his inability to maintain those bonds reveals that patriarchal political right in the U.S., despite its claims to inclusiveness, is delineated as the discrete property of only *certain* men.

Proprietary rights of patriarchal political power remain imbedded in systems that, although couched in the particularly masculine language of fraternity, are stratified according to their ability to triangulate male-male bonds through women. As discussed in the preceding chapter, Claude Levi-Strauss has argued that women function as objects of exchange, as in rituals such as marriage, in order to formulate or strengthen bonds between men. This exchange—what Gayle Rubin has famously termed the “male traffic in women”—

cannot be fully explicated without consideration of the way that key issues of embodiment affect men's abilities to enact such transactions with success. Indeed, it is only through a fuller understanding of the present absence of women in classical liberal constructions of the civil realm that we can begin to map the landscape of the national "family," marking its deepest fissures and tracing its rawest edges. In traditional liberal political theories, the civil world is articulated as distinct from that of the domestic; yet the very construction of the (masculine) civil realm is contingent upon the simultaneous construction of the (feminine) domestic or familial realm as its constitutive outside. Accordingly, Pateman argues, "Political right originates in sex-right or conjugal right. Paternal right is only one, and not the original, dimension of patriarchal power. A man's power as a father comes after he has exercised the patriarchal right of a man (a husband) over a woman (wife)" (SC, 3). This contract between men and women that makes men's entrance into the original social contract and the masculine political right that stems from that entrance possible is conspicuously left out of prevailing liberal characterizations of citizenship in a way that maintains the seemingly masculine nature of political power. It is in this sense that what Pateman has termed the "sexual contract" (frequently displaced onto the marriage contract) and its repression actually prove central to U.S. liberal political theory. As such, the central role of "woman" and women in the production and reproduction of citizens is placed under erasure in order to solidify the imagined bonds of U.S. national brotherhood. Accordingly, this "natural" liberty of brothers must be

achieved through participation in what is assumed to be women's "natural" subordination to men in the private realm and exclusion from the political realm. In short, the heterosexual imperative of the political realm is encapsulated and then repressed in order to allow for a seemingly pure masculine homosocial civil realm that is all the while highly heterosexist.

Kwang proves markedly aware that it is through an exchange of women that bonds are created between men and that those bonds are the necessary precondition for political right. As things begin to fall apart after the discovery of a betrayal by a member of Kwang's political inner circle, Kwang attempts to ensure Henry's loyalty by taking him to a Korean bar and arranging for a hostess to be Henry's companion during the course of the evening. As they sit at the table, the woman begins to perform for Henry and "the pressure and length of her strokes steadily increase with [Kwang's] talk, which is now Korean. It sounds as if he's berating her, but he's telling the girl what to do" (308). In this scene, the woman becomes little more than the embodied extension of Kwang's desire for connection with Henry, an act that if performed properly ought to ensure the bonds between them. Yet before homosocial bonds can be concretized, the woman's performance is interrupted by Sherrie, Kwang's right-hand woman. "This is making me sick," Sherrie protests, "I don't get you two. Is this Korean? You're so brutal. Why don't you just ask the manager for a knife and then see how much of your blood you can offer each other?" (309). Now, feminist impulses would understandably arouse sympathy with Sherrie's desire to unmask this

exchange, yet the fact that her critique is articulated in the language of xenophobia testifies to the interpenetration of race, gender and nation, revealing how readily the violence of patriarchy is mapped onto the seeming foreignness of a racialized subject. Though the exchange of women is actually foundational to U.S. fraternal democracy, it becomes “brutal,” explicit, visible, vulgar and, above all, resoundingly *un-American* in light of Henry and Kwang’s racial identities. It is the repression of the sexual contract, U.S. citizenship’s version of the exchange-of-women system described by Levi-Strauss, within conventional discussions of fraternal democracy that allows for its ready displacement onto Henry and Kwang’s apparently unassimilable foreignness.

For the minority male subject, the enactment of those homosocial rites meant to allow passage into U.S. democratic fraternity and thereby grant the exercise of political right in fact functions to bar the path to full-fledged citizenship, a path that takes an unmarked detour through the bodies of women. In the case of Kwang and Henry, the prescribed triangulation of homosocial bonds through women that is designed to produce transcendent brotherhood further fleshes out the two men’s excessive embodiment. Sherrie’s challenge that the men literally take a blade to their flesh and “offer each other” their blood reveals that, in the case of racialized subjects, brotherhood is not a sublimated spiritual (and ultimately political) bond facilitated by an exchange of women but is a matter of blood, an exchange of bodily fluids. Not surprisingly, the female hostess soon drops out of the equation altogether when Henry intervenes in a

scuffle between Kwang and Sherrie, tackling Kwang beneath one shoulder and pinning him against the wall (309-10). It is thus that the authorized form of male bonding (routed through a woman) disintegrates miserably, becoming unsanctioned, untriangulated homosocial entanglement.

In her groundbreaking analysis of homosocial bonding, Eve Sedgwick lays bare some of the complex ways in which patriarchal power is stratified in order to allow certain men greater access to that power. She argues that, though homosocial bonding is a central component of patriarchal dominance over women, “any ideological purchase on the male homosocial spectrum” also participates in a system that fosters multiple degrees of control and submission among men (86). Within a system of such highly charged homosocial bonds, the delineation of the category of the “homosexual” becomes a central concern, according to Sedgwick, due to “its potential for giving whoever wields it a structuring definitional leverage over the whole range of male bonds that shape the social constitution” (86). She continues her argument:

Not being the creation of any one agency in the society, this tool—the ability to set proscriptive and descriptive limits to the forms of male homosocial desire—became the object of competition among those who wished to wield it, as well as an implement of oppression against those who practices it at any given time proscribed. (87)

While homosexual bonds are severely proscribed, the constitution of what counts as homosexual bonds is not clearly demarcated from other required homosocial

bonds. It is in this sense that the usual opposition constructed between the terms homosexual and homosocial proves virtually untenable, remaining a perpetual site of unresolved contention and causing what Sedgwick calls “homosexual panic” (89).

By placing Sedgwick’s argument in the context of the traditionally constructed civil realm, we see that these phobic tensions are further exacerbated under traditional patriarchal constructions of U.S. citizenship. For while the exchange-of-women structure outlined by Levi-Strauss would suggest that those bonds that superficially appear to be between a man and a woman (marriage, for example) are *in actuality* bonds between men, the fraternal civil realm functions in precisely the opposite way. In the case fraternal democracy, traditionally constituted democratic civil society masquerades as autonomously masculine but is exposed as being *in actuality* predicated upon the necessary subordination of women. Because of this repression of the heterosexual imperative contained in the sexual contract, the structure of the civil realm is marked not only by a misogynistic structural exclusion of women as political agents (through their inclusion as objects of exchange) but also by a concomitant obsessive and, indeed, heightened form of homophobia.

The misogyny and homophobia of traditional civil society are simultaneously registered in a story Janice, Kwang’s media advisor, spins. Following a discussion of Kwang’s apparently pristine character which makes it

difficult for even his own staff to “believe he’s actually a politician,” Janice narrates the possibility of a darker flip-side to Kwang’s character:

There’s some slut who knows a dirty fact about him. Maybe it’s her, or his mob ties, or that he’s secretly a drug kingpin, and she’s blackmailing him. He stupidly strangles her one night after a whole lot of kinky sex. He has a devoted staffer—we’ll call him *Jenkins*—dispose of the body. Trouble is, Jenkins is a self-hating closet homosexual. He’s a raging psychopath. His secret love for John compels him to hold on to her body for secret acts of mutilation and necrophilia. And cannibalism, of course. All for John. (90-1)

Janice’s story registers the anxiety that any participation in homosocial bonds, even when violently triangulated through a woman, necessarily risks finding oneself on the wrong side of the untenable division between homosexuality (or homosexual homosociality) and authorized homosociality. The threat of political demise and the possibility of transgressive behavior (homosexuality, necrophilia and cannibalism) associated with Kwang’s homosocial desirability, however, stands in notable contrast to that of Henry’s father-in-law, Stew. Henry reveals his own ambivalent homosocial desire for Stew:

I knew that I was afraid of him, too. And what it was about Lelia that I desired and feared came partly through his bloodline running through her [. . .] His neatly clipped silver hair and tailored suits and unmitigating stare of eyes and trim old body said it all over in

simple, clear language: Chief Executive Officer. Do not fuck with this man. (119)

Stew radiates affluent white male heterosexual power and thusly stands as the pinnacle of masculine desirability in this system. Yet his desirability, so remarkably unlike Kwang's, is embedded in the warning that Stew is most certainly not to be "*fuck[ed]*" with. Rather, Henry's desire for Stew must be emphatically inoculated against charges of inappropriate homosocial bonding via the successful triangulation through Lelia, Stew's daughter and Henry's wife who has Stew's "bloodline running through her." It is Stew's marked masculinity that both makes him desirable and fearful, fostering desire while sending the prohibitory message against that desire. Such a warning against "fucking" with Stew marks the schizophrenic nature of misogynistic homophobic homosociality and thus of fraternal democracy itself.

Though the congruence between proscribed and prescribed homosocial bonds, according to Sedgwick, menaces all forms of male-male bonding, what appears quite clearly in the comparison of Kwang and Stew's homosocial desirability is the resonance of race in shading where on the homosocial spectrum different citizen-subjects are placed. The proscription against interpreting Stew's desirability transgressively indicates that even he, both because of and despite his virulent masculinity, remains continually susceptible to unauthorized homosocial bonds; yet Stew is nonetheless able to participate in the necessary triangulation through Lelia with a degree of success not made

possible for Kwang. Although Kwang and Stew seem to occupy many of the same power centers (class, gender, and sexuality), Kwang's embodied minority status delegitimizes those occupations as they relate to the national scene, disarming any possibility that he might, like Stew, utilize those privileges to penetrate the repository of political power reserved for properly abstracted citizens.

Apparently, Henry's bonding with Stew via Lelia seems to have been performed with some success, if only because of Stew's relative impenetrability to unauthorized forms of bonding. But the purpose of triangulation—to amalgamate with, or to use the melting pot metaphor, melt into a man with greater leverage in the delineating between acceptable and unacceptable male-male bonds (and thus, I would argue, over the delineation of proper and improper citizens)—proves unrealized in the end. Henry's bond with Stew does not allow Henry any greater access to patriarchal power, as Lelia treats Henry like visitor in his own home:

We play this game in which I am her long-term guest. Permanently visiting. That she likes me okay and bears my presence, but who can know for how long? I step inside and walk to the bedroom and lie down and close my eyes. She follows me and says that this is her room. I usually sleep on the couch. (347)

Henry is treated as though he is "permanently visiting" in his own home, a fact that indicates his status as the "perpetual foreigner." This perception of being

perpetual foreigners has long haunted Asian Americans regardless of the length of time they or their families have resided in the nation. In addition, Henry's racialization complicates the subordination of women usually enacted under the sexual contract, though the destabilization the sexual contract's dynamics are inextricably tied to anti-Asian racism. For in a racist patriarchal system, the possession of a white woman becomes the most powerful signifier of patriarchal power. But as in Henry's case, the enactment of the all important exchange of women functions less to leave Henry, as a minority subject, bonded with Stew than to leave him bound to stereotypical conceptions of Asian Americans. According to the prescriptions of the U.S. national family, Henry is rejected as unassimilably foreign, making him incapable of maintaining the necessary gendered hierarchy and therefore an improper subject for citizenship.

Mixed Race and Fraternal Hope

Henry's desire to amalgamate with Stew fulminates in the birth of his and Lelia's racially-mixed son, Mitt. Remembering the time immediately following Mitt's birth, Henry reveals his hopefulness for Mitt in the following confession:

His face would change soon enough, but he looked so fully Korean then (if nothing like me), and Lelia dead and exhausted and only casually speaking, wondered aloud how she could pass him so little of herself. Of course it didn't concern her further. Though I kept quiet, I was deeply hurting inside, angry with the idea that she

wished he was more white. The truth of my feeling, exposed and ugly to me now, is that I was the one who was hoping whiteness for Mitt, being fearful of what I might have bestowed on him: all that too ready devotion and honoring, and the chilly pitch of my blood, and then all that burning language that I once presumed useless, never uttered and never lived. (285)

Mitt is the embodiment of Henry's desire to amalgamate with Stew, yet amalgamation, even in this its most literal form, does not entirely ease Henry's worries about Mitt's ability to pass unhindered into fraternal democracy. Henry fears that, along with his Asian physiognomy, he passed on to Mitt "all that too ready devotion," his "chilly pitch of blood," and "all that burning language"—in short, those differences, those racial and cultural edges that make the mold of good American citizenship a perpetually poor fit. Henry's disappointment in Mitt's appearance reveals his assimilationist hopes that, in his amalgamation with Stew, Mitt's paternal connection to Henry through signifiers of embodiment will be sufficiently suppressed in order to allow membership in the national family.

Of course, any sort of national familial bonding does not come without cost; actual or literal familial ties are *always* necessarily suppressed in order to enter into the national family. For example, while Henry confesses that he wants to claim that Kwang "was a family man, that being Korean and old-fashioned made him cherish and honor the institution," he is forced to admit that such a proclamation "would only be speaking half the truth, and the most accessible half

at that, the part that had the least to do with him” (146). For while Kwang “loved his family” Henry also notes that “he loved the pure idea of family as well, which in its most elemental version must have nothing to do with blood” (146). Kwang has faith in an American national family that, constituted as such, is meant to transcend notions of blood and thus race; in fact, this “elemental” and “pure” version of the family functions as a platonic ideal that is constructed as the archetype for the ostensibly “natural” family, degraded in its material manifestation of birth, blood and bodies. In this sense, the natural family’s bonds are understood to menace rather than facilitate the metaphor of the national family, requiring in turn that the individual, any individual, suppress those bonds in order to foster democratic kinship.

Yet the U.S.’ fraternal story is predicated upon a suppressed heteronormative, racially homogenous narrative, the marriage plot between a white man and a subordinated white woman who can (re)produce subjects capable of abstraction. Thus, although the national family is supposedly disinterested in the literal bloodlines of its citizen-kin, its institutions are nonetheless hierarchically organized according to race--that social construction which is believed to be writ in the blood and borne out on the body. Franz Fanon identifies this national structure when he states, “the family is the institution that prefigures a broader institution: the social or the national group. Both turn on the same axes. The white family is the workshop in which one is shaped and trained for life in society” (149). If, as Fanon so eloquently argues, the white family

prefigures the nation, then the national family is neither archetypal nor transcendent but is, quite to the contrary, derivative. Then, for the minority subject, the faith that it is represented in the national family hinges, paradoxically enough, on a tacit acceptance of its own illegitimacy as a member of the U.S. family.

The simultaneous suppression of one's literal familial bonds required by the national narrative along with the alienation from the national family results in a profound sense of homelessness for the embodied subject. Upon visiting Kwang's house, Henry notes that the "place feels borrowed" and "unlived in" because "there are no strange smells, no lingering aroma of cooking oils." Rather than comfortable and homey, the house is more like a "showplace for the Kwang's many guests and visiting dignitaries, trimmed in heavy damask and chintz, with freshly cut flowers." Henry notes that the Kwang's house is made up of "thousands of genteel decisions" and "studied cuts"; an inordinate amount of work is required for the Kwangs to pass, however temporarily, as an ordinary American family. Such unseen, unacknowledged work is, as Rachel Lee aptly identifies, part of a long history of the "uneven division of labor and rewards across gender and race" in the U.S. She describes these roles:

The national script of Home requires those who will accommodate to the structure of their new *patria* (usually women and minorities) and those who will revise, transgress, and break current structures, to forge their personal vision of society (usually white males). (51)

Because the Kwangs entertain “visiting dignitaries,” there is an unusually pronounced sense of the *political* importance that adheres to their labor in maintaining the appearance of an effortlessly American *domestic* space.

Creating the idyllic undifferentiated American home does not come without cost. “All those thousands of genteel decisions” that have gone into the Kwang’s carefully constructed façade of the all-American home “unsettle” Henry, who much more prefers “the mostly unconsidered rooms of the basement, the stone walls rough-hewn, damp, ill lighted like any memory.” It is in the basement that they keep the Korean foodstuffs, “the earthenware jars of pickled vegetables and meats, the fermented seasoning pastes and sauces, strips of dried seafood.” And though “all of it was scrupulously sealed and double-wrapped,” Henry explains, “the smell is still Korean, irreparably so, cousin to the happy stink of my mother’s breath” (302-3). In contrast, Stew’s cellar is virtually empty, a fact that Henry discovers once when heading down to retrieve Stew’s favorite scotch. While doing so, Henry “stumbled on dozens of empty case boxes of [scotch], their sleeves flattened and the bottoms punched out, the cardboard neatly stacked about the cellar” (120). I suppose one could argue that the difference in what is kept in the basement of the two homes, Korean foodstuffs versus empty boxes, signifies the cultural richness to which the Kwang’s have access and that Stew’s family does not, but that argument would elide the real violence that the Kwang family endures in favor of an uncritical celebration of difference or—to use mainstream multiculturalism’s favorite catchword—“diversity.” Instead, I would

like to attend to the fact that, in order to preserve their pristinely American *house*, the Kwangs' *home* must undergo a radical division between acceptable American domesticity and unacceptable, or rather, unassimilable signifiers of Korean American homelife.

The fact that the Kwang's basement is "ill lighted like any memory" and that it reminds Henry of the "happy stink" of his "mother's breath" suggests the imbrication of gendered and racial embodiment, both of which must be repressed in order to maintain the continuity of the fraternal national narrative. As political theorist Nicole Fermon identifies in the classical liberal political writings of Jean-Jaques Rousseau, there is "a specter of woman that haunts nationalism." Fermon's discussion of Rousseau's political theories illuminates the place of woman as mother in liberal civil society:

For Rousseau, woman is the mother who is lost and found again in multiple arenas, the mother whose body must be transcended and overcome. Woman is the mother who, when embodied in the state and its relations administers life as well as death. Woman as mother troubles the father(s): she is the only one who can legitimate the child-citizen, who can give him his (his own, i.e., the father's) name. (171)

While woman as mother must play a part in the (re)production of the child-citizen, her excessive gendered embodiment simultaneously threatens to taint the inchoate citizen and make him unworthy for abstraction. It then follows that

abstraction hinges on the infant-citizen's ability to transcend the maternal body. Similarly, just as the tale of the originary pleasure experienced in the unbroken mother-child dyad of psychoanalytic theory is meant to be repressed in order to differentiate the self (that forgetting of which Freud has so insistently and obsessively reminded us), Fanon suggests that a similar repression must occur for the colonial subject. According to Fanon, the colonial subject who "climbs up into society—white and civilized—tends to reject his family—black and savage—on the plane of imagination," thereby casting the family "back into the id" (149). In Henry's mother, the specters of *both* foreign and maternal attachments are interwoven, threatening to dissolve his claims to old-fashioned, red-blooded, white-skinned American citizenship.

Though his amalgamation with Stew, embodied in Mitt, apparently does little to improve Henry's status as a failed citizen, he continues to hope for better returns for Mitt in the arena of American citizenship. But we soon learn that Mitt, far from ascending to the status of American iconicity suggested by recent constructions of mixed race, is ultimately crushed, quite literally, under the weight of U.S. national fraternity. After overcoming the racial antagonism of other boys in the prosperous, highly white New York suburb to which Henry and Lelia relocate, Mitt eventually becomes "thick" and "friends for life" with his new suburban playmates. In a horrible "accident," Mitt is suffocated under the weight of his buddies in a "dog pile." Henry describes the tragic scene:

A crush. You pale little boys are crushing him, your adoring mob of hands and feet, your necks and heads, your nostrils and knees, your still-sweet sweat and teeth and grunts. Too thick anyway, to breathe. How pale his face, his chest. Blanket his eyes. Listen, now. You can hear the attempt of his breath, that unlost voice, calling us from the bottom of the world. (107)

The fact that Stew's bloodline runs through Mitt's veins cannot save him from being, similar to Henry, ultimately excluded from the center of political power. But unlike Henry, Mitt's tragedy registers not the utter inability of the minority subject to be abstracted into citizenship but the violence entailed when embodied subjects pass into abstraction. Lisa Lowe argues that in order for the minority subject to be represented as a citizen in the political realm, "the subject is 'split off' from the unrepresentable histories of situated embodiment that contradict the abstract form of citizenship" (2). In fact, Mitt is given voice in the text through a number of tapes that he made while playing with a tape recorder (110). For both Henry and Lelia, these tapes serve as reminders of the trauma of Mitt's death and of his continuing absence from their lives. As the tapes suggest, the minority subject's voice (that privileged instrument in democratic representation) is wrenched from the body (the locus of memory) through abstraction. Representation achieved through abstraction is thus a lethal antidote for Asian American political invisibility.

We are further reminded of Mitt's similarity to Henry when he mimics Henry's use of the tape recorder for his work as a spy. Henry recounts how Mitt "watched [him] speak into the machine." Mitt would "recline on the sofa with his little legs propped on pillows, speaking intermittently into the recorder as though he were taking drags on a cigarette." As Mitt gets older, he learns to hide the recorder, which causes Henry to fear "his perceptiveness, what he might have seen of [him], or even possibly thought in his young mind." By then, Mitt had learned "the notion of being careful of what you said." (107). In brief, Henry worries that Mitt has learned from him the methods of spying. In *Mitt*, Native Speaker sheds light on the way in which mixed race subjects can find themselves unintentional "spies." Though Henry views Mitt's appearance as "so beautifully jumbled and subversive and historic," his appearance primarily signifies whiteness. Lelia's side of the family had "endowed Mitt with that other, potent sprawl of limbs, those round, vigilant eyes, the upturned ancestral nose (like a scrivener's, in [Henry's] imagination. While vacationing in suburbia at Henry's father's home for the summer, Mitt learns racist anti-Asian epithets and repeats them "innocently" to Henry, calling him "a chink, a jap, a gook" (103). Mitt's unclear racial identity apparently gave him access to the uncensored language of the other white suburban children. But once Mitt is seen with his white mother and Korean father, he is "outed," losing his racial anonymity. The children realize he is a racialized subject, and he is likewise hemmed in by words

like “mutt, mongrel, half-breed, banana, twinkie”—his seeming subversiveness subsumed by the taunts of children.

People identifying as mixed race have further been accused by some writers of being disloyal to monoracially identified people of color. Ranier Spencer, discussed in the previous chapter for his vocal criticism of the mixed race movement, articulates this position:

The erasure is accomplished very quietly and very neatly, but it is an erasure nonetheless--of hundreds of years of history, of life stories, of realities. It is important to acknowledge that those realities are erased explicitly for the sake of erecting the mirage of modern-day multiracial identity. It is an axiological shifting, a reordering of positive value from that which exists to that which does not, and the concomitant extirpation of the former. In that sense it is also a kind of robbery. (87)

According to Spencer’s construction of mixed race, the mixed race subject is, by the very assertion of a mixed race identity, fabricating a false persona, a “mirage,” by which to betray other people of color. As mentioned earlier, there is a real danger of fetishizing mixed race in a manner that erases the complex history of mixed race in the United States. Nonetheless, the assertion the identification of mixed race necessarily indicates subterfuge is not unlike conservative arguments which suspect minority racial identification to be “anti-American.”

Mitt's death occurs prior to Henry's narrative, but Henry, far from having achieved any peace with his son's passing, spends a great deal of time tracing and retracing Mitt's short life. In narrating Mitt's story as one in which he becomes close, even brotherly, friends with the other boys in the neighborhood after overcoming their racism (they call him "twinkie," "mutt," "banana" and teach him to call Henry "Charlie Chan"), Henry participates in producing the illusion of fraternal democracy. For Henry, Mitt's death becomes a story of brotherly equality where an "adoring mob of hands" seems to accidentally love Mitt to death. Henry notably describes the scene as "a crush." This scene of violence cannot but be linked not only to unsanctioned homosociality (for which Mitt, as an embodied subject, must bear the consequences) as well as to Mitt's racial difference (mapped out in this scene of failed homosociality). Yet in Henry's rendition of it, Mitt's death is woven into a narrative of sibling rivalry, akin to Benedict Anderson's notion of the "reassurance of fratricide"—a mechanism of national identity-making which emerged during the nineteenth century. The uneven histories and violent schisms experienced within the nation must be, in order for the nation to imagine its history as a contiguous march toward its present state of (seeming) wholeness, retrospectively narrated as sibling rivalry. He offers the following description:

These striking nineteenth century imaginings of fraternity, emerging 'naturally' in a society fractured by the most violent racial class and regional antagonisms, show as clearly as anything else that

nationalism in the age of Michelet and Renan represented a new form of consciousness—a consciousness that arose when it was no longer possible to experience the nation as new, at the wave top moment of rupture. (203)

Perhaps the clearest example of the reassurance of fratricide in the U.S. national consciousness, a consciousness that Anderson argues borrows markedly heavily from the notion of fratricide, is evinced in the narrative of the Civil War cast as a war between the brothers of the North and South. Fratricide allows the nation to reconfigure its fragmented past as a contiguous whole, unified, despite past antagonisms, by the natural, unalterable intimacy of familial ties. Similarly, Henry's reconstruction of Mitt's death assimilates it into the logic of fraternal democracy and American inclusiveness, mollifying racial tensions by preserving the possibility of the American Dream.

The text's interrogation of the violence entailed in the minority subject's inclusion in the national brotherhood is further demonstrated in the moment of Kwang's political death. Following the exposure of the messy political scandal mentioned earlier in this essay, a crowd gathers near Kwang's home to confront him. The mob quickly turns violent, viciously charging after Kwang. Henry decides that he "will not bear this" and rushes to assist Kwang, who is already "three bodies deep, barely protected by the plainclothes cops." Henry describes the rest of the scene:

And when I reach him I strike at them. I strike at everything that shouts and calls. Everything but his face. But with every blow I land I feel another equal to it ring my own ears, my neck, the back of my head. I half welcome them. And at the very moment I fall back for good he glimpses who I am, and I see him crouch down, like a broken child, shielding from me his wide immigrant face. (343)

“Three bodies deep” and looking like a “broken child” Kwang’s symbolic political death parallels Mitt’s literal physical death in a way that intimates their shared relation (i.e., a crushing inclusion) to the national fraternal order. Furthermore, this connection between Kwang and Mitt importantly intervenes in the currently fetishistic construction of mixed race, by aligning Mitt’s death with the violence the nation enacts on minority subjects.

More importantly, the parallelism between Kwang and Mitt intimates their similar troubling of the sovereign will as conventionally constituted in liberal political theory. John Kwang is read in the mainstream media as a man “building an ‘empire’ from his ‘ethnic base’ in Queens” (301). The sentiment that the U.S. faces an imperialist threat from within by way of the political empowerment of “ethnic” (i.e., minority and/or immigrant) population reveals the belief that racial and ethnic difference are inimical to the preservation of the sovereign or general will of the nation. Kwang identifies such a fear in a conversation with Henry:

But the more racial strife they can report, the more the public questions what good any of this diversity brings. The underlying

sense of what's presented these days is that this country has difference that ails rather than strengthens and enriches. You can see what can happen from this, how the public may begin viewing anything outside mainstream experience and culture to be threatening or dangerous. There is a closing going, Henry, slowly but steadily, a narrowing of who can rightfully live here and be counted. (274)

Insofar as the "proper" citizen is predicated on propertied white heterosexual maleness, differences in interests that emerge from embodied "ethnic" or racialized subjectivities are registered, not as contributing to the general will, but risking its disintegration.

Given *Native Speaker's* alignment of the mixed race subject with the more racially marginalized subject via the parallelism between Mitt and Kwang, mixed race's recent ascendancy to American iconicity ought to seem odd. According to the traditional dichotomization of race along a white/non-white binary, Mitt, as a mixed race subject who isn't "all white or all yellow," (129) is much more like the tainted child-citizen of Rousseau's discourse than—to employ *Time* magazine's fetishizing phrase—"America's new face." The mixed-race subject's unsettling of the usual white/non-white racial dichotomy cannot simply be read as an ameliorative salve covering over racial tensions. Just as the permeability of the dividing line between homosexuality and homosociality recharges the significance of these terms, race mixing reinvigorates the

significance of white racial purity. For as Mitt's death reveals, the iconicity of mixed race can occur only via the violent suppression of the U.S.' historically schizophrenic treatment of miscegenation: allowed for under slavery, imperialism, militarization, while elsewhere legally and socially proscribed. As such, the mixed-race subject becomes the ultimate sign of a family who fails to achieve national status, who in mixing blood taints the national body.

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Chapter 4

The Frontier Myth and the Making of Asian American Mixed Race

“Americanizing does not always mean improving or even civilizing,” asserts the first published Chinese American writer Sui Sin Far in a 1909 news article, “It ought to, but it does not.” Far, the daughter of a white father and a Chinese mother, challenges the then widely held belief that American culture possesses a reformatory power for the supposedly barbaric lesser races like the Chinese. In fact, she sees it as potentially encouraging degeneration, stating “[s]ome Chinese are not nearly as fine men after coming in contact with Western civilization as they were before” (257). Far never provides the concrete details that cause her to make such a claim, but the criticism is clear: American influence can have a corrosive effect.

Nineteenth-century American expansionism made mingling with “inferior” races inevitable. While some expansionists believed inferior races would either die out or be eradicated in the face of undeniable white American superiority, most expansionists “enthusiastically endorsed the idea that the future course of American expansion and world history was to be shaped by a superior race imposing its will on a variety of inferior races” (Horsman, 247). Expansion was not only inevitable, they argued, but it would be beneficial to the unfortunate races who would be exposed to the civilizing effects of democracy, Christianity, and capitalism. By the turn of the century, white Americans had migrated in large numbers to the Pacific shore, and supporters of expansionism were looking

beyond the United States' continental borders to spread American ideals. In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" had declared the frontier period to be over, offering his famous characterization of how it shaped a distinctly American psyche of rugged individualism. Given such assertions regarding the end of this formative period in American history, correct or not, and increasing interest in American imperialism, it was an opportune moment to reflect on the civilizing promise of continental expansion as Sui Sin Far does.

Within the expansionist ethic, which encompasses a narrative of benevolent cultural hegemony, mixed race subjects are unusually positioned to bear witness to the effects of cross-racial contact not only because their liminality allows greater access to both dominant white culture and a marginalized nonwhite culture but also because they are able to observe intercultural, interracial exchanges in the intimate context of the familial realm. Some mixed race writers like Sui Sin Far and later Diana Chang make use of their unique positioning in order to undermine the argument in favor of expansionism's ability to foster cultural progress among "lesser" races, exposing such thinking as a cover for what is ultimately a racist imperial project. Beyond providing a form of ethnographic reportage aimed at subverting dominant accounts of interracial mingling, these writers further attempt to rearticulate the meaning of mixed race by casting mixed race subjects as the vanguard of a racially progressive frontier. This move serves as an important early intervention in the pejorative formulation

of the racially mixed as signs of racial, cultural and moral degeneracy, a formulation exhibited in the exposés of Chinatown discussed in the preceding chapter. In these interventions, the logic of Manifest Destiny domestically and imperialism abroad is strategically inverted such that contact between whites and nonwhites is demonstrated to have a civilizing effect on the intransigent, regressive racial attitudes of dominant white society. For early mixed race writers, this reinterpretation of Manifest Destiny and its international extensions, while problematic in ways that I will address later, constitutes a crucial assertion of the mixed-race subject's personhood in the face of unapologetic denigration in broader society.

As I will trace in my discussion, this engagement with the idea of mixed race and the myth of the American frontier continues into the present, though with varying aims and effects depending on the context. More recent authors have complicated the idea of the frontier in understanding mixed race. Accordingly, I will look at John Yau's short story "Hawaiian Cowboys" to examine its illumination of Hawai'i's problematic figuration in Cold War propaganda as an idealized frontier that promises a racial paradise. The short story additionally creates a productive opening to analyze how the idea of race mixing has historically been put into the service of expansionism and to consider some of the implications that flow from that construction. Those implications will be teased out through a discussion of the 1970s network show *Kung Fu*, which borrows from expansionist formulations of mixed race to position the mixed race subject as an

advocate for more conservative racial politics. Nina Revoyr's *Wingshooters* further critiques the notion of the mixed race subject as the idealized pioneer for a racial frontier by demonstrating how the minority subject's contact with homogeneously white groups, even when the minority subject is part white, rarely results in transformative racial understanding.

Claiming the Frontier

In my first chapter, I discuss how Diana Chang's novel *The Frontiers of Love* calls into question Freudian subject formation in light of the mixed race subject whose family does not conform to the racially homogenous family assumed by classic psychoanalysis. At this juncture, I would like to return to that text to consider how it gestures toward the hope of a racially progressive frontier represented by the mixed race subject. Certainly, the novel's title signals an interest in the metaphor of the frontier for understanding mixed race, but despite the setting in wartime Shanghai, an unlikely place to invoke the frontier myth, a careful examination of the text reveals more than a passing interest in the concept of the frontier as it relates to mixed race. While Sylvia, the novel's most successful character, is walking through the streets of Shanghai with her mother Helen, Helen begins to imagine all that would be available to them if they "were back in New York" (47). "[W]e could take in a Broadway show or spend a weekend in Connecticut, Helen explains, "[w]e could go up to the Cloisters or the Frick Museum, have dinner in the Tavern on the Green. In Helen's mind, the

sophistication of New York, signaled in her reference to its prominent museums and eateries, is juxtaposed to the supposed lack of cultivation apparent in Shanghai where she felt they were “just decaying, out here in the middle of nowhere.” The significance of the contrast Helen draws is not lost on Sylvia:

‘Out here’ was the vocabulary of extraterritoriality and colonialism, and Helen meant it literally, in the Rudyard Kipling sense, white man’s burden and all. Out here in the jungle, out here in the desert, out here among the savages, out here in the leper colony. And the Chinese to her were part savage, part leperous and totally mysterious. (48)

From Helen’s vantage, the superiority of American culture over Chinese culture is unquestionable, but that idealization of the United States is undercut by Sylvia’s own memory of her visit there as a child. It proved to be “less wonderful than expected; everything was a disappointment” (49). Sylvia’s deflated view of the United States serves as a counterpoint to Helen’s idealized view, calling into question the superiority of Western culture.

Yet the text takes this interrogation of Western involvement in the East even further. As I point out in my first chapter, we leave Sylvia at the novel’s end looking out over the ocean surrounding Shanghai, which “felt like an invisible beachhead on a level with her eyes” (240). This language of invasion as Sylvia looks westward, leaves open the interpretation that the novel not only challenges the ability of Western culture to proffer any benefit to the Chinese subjects it is

meant to “civilize,” but also that Western culture stands to be improved by “foreign” influences. In short, the novel asserts it is the West that needs to adapt. When Sylvia’s father, Liyi, proclaims that his mixed race “children, free from any narrow chauvinism, were the new citizens for an expanding century,” he reaffirms the sentiment that the West’s purported stewardship over the progress of humankind has come to an end (145). Liyi positions his mixed race children as subjects pioneering the way toward a new, more progressive social order, a notion that intervenes in the period’s largely contemptuous formulation of mixed race.

The familiar narrative of Manifest Destiny in which the superiority of white Americans is demonstrated in their expansion into “untamed” territory and subordination of non-white peoples was underwritten by fear of race mixing. In *Race and Manifest Destiny*, Reginald Horsman provides a germane description of such thinking:

This supreme confidence in the racial strength of white America was accompanied by the desire that this special race and its government should not be tainted and weakened by any inferior peoples. What had once been merely felt was now backed by the best scientific evidence--nations and peoples could lose their greatness by mixing with inferior peoples. (272)

Rejecting the notion that mixing with inferior races would bring about the demise of white dominance, *The Frontiers of Love* “flips the script” of expansionism,

where the mixed race subject is cast as an ideal “new citizen.” This alternative myth functions as a bulwark against the denigrating treatment of mixed race and other people of color.

It is not entirely surprising that Chang would engage with the frontier myth as a means to challenge indirectly America’s role in proselytizing freedom and democracy across the globe at the time. Published in 1956 and set in Shanghai at the end of World War II, the novel’s depiction of segregation in Shanghai obliquely critiques the postwar racial climate of the United States at a time when anti-communist furor made “subversive” views of America anathema, especially for members of marginalized groups. Opponents of civil rights additionally attempted to delegitimize the movement by aligning it with communism (Borstelmann, 65). *Brown v. The Board of Education* ended legal segregation in schools only two years prior, and it would be another eight years until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 would end the legal segregation of public spaces. The events of World War II challenged the determinacy of race, and according to Thomas Borstelmann’s analysis in *The Cold War and The Color Line*, a tug-of-war developed over how to situate the civil rights movement vis-à-vis the Cold War and efforts at decolonization abroad. “The most salient fact about both race and American diplomacy between 1945 and 1953,” argues Borstelmann, “was how contested and in flux each of them was” (61). In an effort to legitimize the expansion of this new version of Manifest Destiny onto foreign soil in the form of

democratization, America needed to tidy up its own domestic space.

Borstelmann summarizes the contradiction:

One aspect of race in the United States that was not succeeding fast enough, however, was the struggle of African Americans to achieve full civil rights. Consequently, Americans remained in peril of forfeiting their claim to leadership of a mostly nonwhite world.

(61)

Given this juxtaposition of the United States' failure to ensure democratic equality domestically on the one hand and its stated goal of spreading democracy abroad on the other, Chang's characterization of the mixed race subject as the ideal "new citizen for an expanding century" can be read as a critique of the patriarchal white pioneer who she substitutes with a nonwhite female sojourner at the forefront of the new frontier. This move at once evokes the promise of unmitigated freedom that makes the American frontier myth so seductive while also highlighting the United States' failure to make good on that promise for a large number of its citizens.

The Hawai`i Question

Because domestic racial prejudice threatened to undercut America's position in the propaganda battles of the Cold War, sympathizing or at least appearing to sympathize with civil rights objectives was required to bolster expansionist aspirations beyond the boundaries of the United States. Seeming to hold the promise of both ensuring a stronghold in the Pacific and repairing

America's image with regard to civil rights, the proposition of Hawaiian statehood appeared to be a boon to the expansionist cause. Of course, the United States had for decades been exploiting Hawai'i's strategic utility as a military outpost, and its importance as such only continued to increase as entanglements in Asia during the Cold War deepened. Still, Southern Democrats opposed the inclusion of a state whose majority was nonwhite. According to Christina Klein, democratic senators from southern states were "struggling to maintain the legal separation of races in their own states" and thus were "threatened by the prospect of a multiracial state that eschewed legal segregation and would likely elect non-white and pro-civil rights senators" (247). But for proponents of statehood, Hawai'i's multiracial population was a key reason for Hawai'i's admittance. Eisenhower's 1956 "State of the Union" address reveals such a perspective:

In the Hawaiian islands, East meets West. To the islands, Asia and Europe and the Western Hemisphere, all the continents have contributed their peoples and their cultures to display a unique example of a community that is a successful laboratory in human brotherhood. Statehood, supported by the repeatedly expressed desire of the island's people and by our traditions, would be a shining example of the American way to the entire earth.

Because of Hawai'i's diversity, statehood played well on a number of fronts. It would prove that differing racial groups could indeed live harmoniously, demonstrate a genuine commitment to race-blind democratic equality, and

relatedly, provide some assurance that the United States would treat nonwhite nations fairly.

Images of mixed race people played an important role in the Cold War discussions circulating around Hawai`i. In analyzing Strom Thurmond's opposition to statehood, Klein notes how "the specter of miscegenation haunts" his thinking (248). But for statehood advocates, Hawai`i's mixed race population functions as a sign of American potential. According to Christine Skwiot, proponents of statehood "presented the beauty of [Hawai`i's] mixed-race people, particularly the women and children, as a leading reason for U.S. tourists to visit" so that they might bear witness to how the "Asian-descended majority had become so thoroughly Americanized" as to deserve "the full rights of citizenship and national belonging that the mainland had not long ago extended to recently whitened European ethnics" (12). These representations of beautiful mixed race women and children were meant to give lie to the belief that race mixing produces degeneracy, emphasizing a fluid ethnic paradigm through which to view the United States' citizenry (Klein, 249). The message is clear: anyone can be an American.

Whether or not that message was true is another matter. This question is taken up in John Yau's short story "Hawaiian Cowboys," which engages the westward-looking hopefulness of the continental Asian American mixed race subject and reveals the initial pleasure discovered by the story's narrator to be read as a "local" while vacationing on the Big Island of Hawai`i. That pleasure, I

would suggest, stems from the historically positive construction in mainstream United States' culture of mixed race in the context of Hawai`i--a construction that prefigures similar constructions of mixed race more generally at the end of the twentieth century. The narrator, who resides in Manhattan and is the son of a Dutch father and Chinese mother, senses that pleasure dissipating once he and his white wife Janet decide to venture away from their usual routine of leisurely whiling away their time within a carefully circumscribed, sanitized, quasi-exotic spaces as many Hawaiian vacationers often do. Having left that space in an effort to see the rest of the island, the narrator is forced to confront the many cultural contradictions of Hawai`i, and though he tries at first, he cannot suture them all into his optimistic view of Hawai`i as a racially and culturally inclusive paradise.

Preparing for an excursion into unfamiliar parts of the island, the narrator heads to the nearby general store where the owner, an older woman named Haraki, mistakes him as Hawai`i born. This misreading makes him "happy, happier that [he'd] been in weeks" (Yau, 87). Invigorated by Haraki's error, the narrator hurriedly walks back to his vacation house and exclaims to his wife, "You won't believe what just happened!" He continues his account: "Haraki, you know, the old woman who owns the general store, just asked me what island I'm from. Isn't that great? She thinks I'm from here, from one of the other islands" (88). Janet, though, "doesn't seem to want to share [his] enthusiasm" and instead "shatter[s]" his story into "a bunch of details" by questioning him about specifics

of the conversation that do not relate to his being read as local (88). Haraki's mistake provides notable pleasure for this Asian American mixed race subject despite being a misidentification that he has to correct by explaining the island he is from is Manhattan. Broadly speaking, this scene represents the common desire by visitors to appear as one of the initiated, avoiding the conspicuousness of being a tourist. In economies that depend largely on tourism such as Hawai'i, the distinction between "tourist" and "local" is heavily freighted; histories of colonization and militarization make such distinctions all the more fraught. Paul Spickard offers the description:

For White tourists (even those tourists who have come repeatedly and who feel they know the islands well) and for military people (even those with long hitches and a high degree of local knowledge) this History means that they are not part of Hawai'i. They love the surf and sun. They love the laid-back pace of life. They love the gentle warmth of the welcome they receive from the tourist industry. They love the exotic feel of peoples and foods from all over the Pacific and Asia. Some of them love to feel in the know, to learn a little Hawaiian culture, to try to talk pidgin. By far the majority of tourists and military people are more or less oblivious to the history of racial hierarchy and dispossession that has characterized Hawaii's past and shapes its present. They are

generally welcomed in the islands as visitors, but they are not local.

(181)

Being local, Spickard contends, is “not a status to which you can aspire.” In his view, localness “is a social position that you may have only when local people recognize it in you” (184). In other words, local identity is bestowed rather than claimed. It is based not only on cultural knowledge but also on a knowledge of the unequal power relations that have shaped the culture of the islands.

Though the desire to be accepted as local is a familiar sentiment among visitors to Hawai`i, the significance of being read as an insider for the Asian American mixed race subject has a unique valence as the narrator and his wife’s differential reactions to the misreading indicate. As a mixed race Asian American subject hailing from the continent, the narrator has in all probability rarely if ever had the experience in which his body signifies as easily belonging to any racial group such that, even when the belief that he “belongs” is incorrect, the feeling of affiliation is embraced and celebrated. I previously discussed a similar scene in Diana Chang’s *Frontier’s of Love* in which Sylvia, one of the novel’s central mixed race characters, reveals “her heart leaped inordinately with something close to joy” when she is grouped with her racially mixed friend Feng as another “white Chinese” (120, 126). In her collection of essays, *Hapa Tales and Other Lies*, Sharon Chang, much like the narrator of “Hawaiian Cowboys” explains how in her “personal search for rooted belonging in a multiracial body, [she] was misled by colonialist narratives” causing her “to believe, as an Asian mixed girl

and woman, that [she] could find that belonging in a settler myth about Hawai`i” (10). Looking to Hawaii for a coherent mixed race identity is apparent in the commonly used Hawaiian term “hapa” by mixed race Asian Americans on the continent, a practice that has garnered some criticism for being a form of cultural appropriation. Chang agrees with such an assessment:

There is a need to speak directly to power and point out that dominant culture encourages those of us who are non-Native to become politically apathetic hapas precisely because it upholds the white supremacy and settler colonialism built upon the backs of Native Hawaiian suffering (9).

For Chang, identifying with Hawaiian cultural signifiers as a means to achieve a more unified sense of identity is to subscribe to the belief that race mixing is a sign of a post-racial paradise and to ignore the painful history of colonialism in Hawai`i.

Like Chang, the gratification enjoyed by the narrator of “Hawaiian Cowboys” from identifying with local Hawaiian culture is fleeting. For the first two weeks of their stay on the island, the couple had spent their days following the same routine: waking, eating a breakfast of mangoes and papayas, packing a lunch, spending the day at the beach, and finally returning to their borrowed vacation home and counting geckos on the veranda before going to bed. This idyllic Hawaiian vacation registers just enough of the exotic (equatorial flora, fauna, and landscape) to create the feeling of a distant tropical paradise without

inciting the discomfort of being disoriented by an excess of difference. Further illustrating this desire for manageable difference, the narrator at one point reports seeing “[s]trange flowers, some of which we are able to *recognize*” (Yau, 97; emphasis added). The seemingly contradictory “recognizable strangeness” of the flowers signifies that optimal blending of the familiar and unfamiliar that tourists often seek out and tourist industries carefully curate, yet as the couple leaves the security of their routine, this mixing of the familiar and unfamiliar becomes increasingly incongruous, jarring even, such that it disrupts the narrator’s naive vision of “paradise.” Their first stop on their day trip is at a roadside stand for lunch; the stand serves what the narrator describes as “an odd combination of Japanese and American food,” Hawaiian-style bentos, which they find unpalatable. “Meat that was a mysterious and not altogether appetizing hybrid of fried pork and sweet bologna” is among the victuals nestled in their bentos, which they eat at a “shady picnic table” near a “harbor full of huge oil tankers waiting to offload their cargo into the silver storage tanks, glistening like sunbathers in the bright noon heat” (95). The dissonance in this image of picturesque shady picnic table overlooking industrial tankers is underscored by the remarkably unpoetic simile, comparing storage tanks to sunbathers, with which the sentence finishes. The simile is most interesting for the ways in which the comparison fails; indeed, I would argue the comparison that is truly being invited here is between the dissonance registered in the components of the simile (silver storage tanks/sunbathers) and the dissonance registered in aspects of the setting (shady

picnic table/industrial tankers). In contrast to the welcome tolerable unfamiliarity of the aforementioned flowers, the mingling of the familiar and unfamiliar in this instance results in a grating discordancy.

Interestingly, the narrator compares the “odd combination” of food he discovers at the roadside stand to the mongooses that were introduced to Hawaii at the end of the nineteenth century by the sugar industry in order to control the rat population. “Like the mongoose,” the narrator explains, the meal was “both completely out of place and the perfect thing to serve at a rundown roadside stand” (95). In fact, introducing the mongoose to Hawai`i failed to achieve the desired result of diminishing the numbers of rats, and earlier in the story, the narrator, who had read about the mongoose in a guide book, recounts the history of the mongoose’s lackluster tenure in Hawai`i:

The rats had been stowaways on the ships that stopped here, but the mongoose was an invited guest. However, the mongoose importer had made a serious, irreversible miscalculation. The rat does its food gathering at night, beneath the moon and stars, while the mongoose likes to do its hunting in broad daylight. The rat and the mongoose are not even, as Sinatra sings, strangers in the night. (92)

Invoking the idea of the mongoose as an “invited guest” who is at once “completely out of place” and yet “irreversib[ly]” ensconced in the Hawaiian ecosystem challenges in the construction of Hawai`i as a multicultural paradise in

which divergent racial and ethnic groups immigrate to blend with one another harmoniously in tropical splendor.

It is more than simply the sense that the mongoose is misplaced that troubles the narrator's Hawaiian fantasy. The image of the mongoose further functions as an indictment of the exploitation of the islands' resources on a number of fronts. For example, tourists, similar to the mongoose, are "invited guests" whose presence is cast on the surface as beneficial but ultimately places incredible strain on the environment. "Shortly after being let loose," the narrator details, "the mongoose began growing fat and happy on a diet of brightly colored birds which weren't prepared to deal with these nasty little creatures" (92). In addition to conjuring the history of colonialism in Hawaii, a parallel is drawn here between the corpulence of the mongoose as it feeds on the native Hawaiian birds and the opulence of resorts who profit from the beauty of the islands and of indigenous culture. Shortly after leaving their vacation home to begin their excursion, the narrator and his wife notice a "row of elegant white buildings by the beach, the electronic gate just off the road, and the modest but telling sign indicating a private resort" where they come to learn "each party has their own chef and masseuse, and each house comes with a private swimming pool" (96). Resorts are themselves contentious signifiers. According to Skwiot, the resort "served as a central site for the sociability and reproduction of cosmopolitan white elites and those accorded honorary whiteness" while at the same time "it

became a leading symbol used by movements against racism and imperialism and for democracy across lines of class and color” (8).

Though the narrator of “Hawaiian Cowboys” never highlights the contrast, the resort is a far cry from the “shacks, tilting and tumbling” he and his wife happen upon later where the residents who work in the resorts would be likely to live. The resort’s proximity to their borrowed vacation home indicates they are staying in a more affluent neighborhood. Thus, as the couple moves further away from the non-threatening exotic difference of their accommodations, they encounter class distinctions that puncture the illusion of Hawai`i as multicultural, multiracial paradise.

Contrary to what one might expect, I would argue that it isn’t just the overflow of difference that vexes this narrator; he also seems troubled by the continued percolation of things familiar in spaces where recognizable difference is expected and desired. Noting that the vacation is making the narrator “morbid” like he is “cooking some kind of weird mental stew,” Janet recalls how, when they were passing through Honolulu, the narrator becomes upset because a cab driver kept insisting that they visit Pearl Harbor. The narrator defends his reaction with the assertion:

A Japanese man in his early sixties tells me that I should go to Pearl Harbor. For what? Does that mean he’s more American or something? Does it mean that I’m not, because I haven’t gone and I don’t intend to? What am I supposed to say? That I like going to the

Bishop's museum more, that I'd rather look at all the specimens of extinct birds, that I like looking at all the feathered robes, that I like learning about who and what were here before any of us arrived.

(93-4)

His defense reveals his preference of imagining Hawai'i in terms of a pristine pre-contact past rather than embedded in the unequal power relations entailed in the United States' and Japan's histories of colonialism and militarization that is suggested by the reference to Pearl Harbor.

Denying the more troubling aspects of Hawai'i's history in favor of focusing on a notion of pre-colonial Hawai'i that existed "before any of us arrived," the narrator is able to sustain an account of nearly universal belonging. Riffing off of Gertrude Stein's famous quote about Oakland, the narrator ponders, "What if she had come to Hawaii? What would she have written then?" He proposes the answer: "There is only there there." (92). He finds this characterization "comforting to remember," as to him it signifies "[a]ll of us are from different islands"—his just happens to be Manhattan. In this telling of Hawaiian history, non-indigenous groups equally do not belong and thus belong equally. The local/visitor dichotomy shifts to the indigenous/non-indigenous dichotomy, facilitating his fantasy of being as local as nearly anyone else. Undoubtedly, keeping indigeneity within view is crucial, but Yau's text here demonstrates how uncritically doing so places the local/visitor binary under erasure in a manner that fosters a view of Native Hawaiian culture as a beautiful,

static curiosity from the past; moreover, such an uncritical treatment extirpates the significant role of race in the United States' expansion into the Pacific.

When the couple stumbles across a diner catering to the local population, the narrator's fantasy of being local can no longer be sustained. The restaurant, which is in a town that looks to him like a scene from a "movie of the west," is full of people who clearly "aren't on vacation" (99, 100). Among them are several men "dressed as cowboys," and most of them are "Asian or Hawaiian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Polynesian, and Samoan." Observing them as he does makes the narrator "feel like a nosy neighbor" who peers over the "other side of the fence," wanting to "see who's living on the other side, what they're up to." No longer feeling as though he belongs, the narrator is forced to see himself as a voyeur rather than participant in local culture. Compounding this revelation, the men in cowboy attire remind him of a photograph taken of him as a child "dressed up like Hopalong Cassidy" wearing a "Davy Crockett hat" that he "begged" of his mother for Christmas. The photograph, he reveals, was taken before he realized he "could never be Wyatt Earp, Jesse James, or Daniel Boone" (100). In his discussion of Yau's short story, Steven M. Lee notes the manner in which this scene speaks to the "innocence of boyhood fantasy as well as the grown-up realization of racialization" (244). Digesting the restaurant scene, the narrator explains, "I look around and see men in fancy alligator boots, silver belts, and embroidered shirts; he continues, "Others are in dusty dungarees, leather chaps, sweat stained shirts, and bandanas." He soon

apprehends “[n]one of them are pretending, like [he] was when [he] was a child (Yau, 100). At this moment, looking more closely to notice the men in “dusty dungarees” and “sweat stained shirts” causes the narrator to realize these men are not, as he originally thinks, “*dressed* as cowboys” but *are* cowboys (99; emphasis added). What “surprised” him because it appeared to be a town that one would expect to “see in Wyoming or Texas” (but certainly not in Hawai`i) turns out to be a town with a history that the narrator now recognizes as reaching back to the “days when the West was still being won by some and lost by others” (101). Understanding that this western town reflects a legitimate aspect of Hawai`i’s culture further forces him to acknowledge the illusory nature of Hawai`i constructed as the tropical paradise promoted in tourism brochures. First experiencing his outsider status by way of the unanticipated presence of the nonwhite Hawaiian cowboys, the narrator is then doubly displaced when the continental American cultural significance of the cowboy, typically white, bears down on him in the form of a childhood memory. He feels that he lacks the cultural knowledge needed to be a Hawaiian cowboy and lacks the racial background to be a continental American cowboy.

Yau thus gives a story that is bookended by two misreadings of a physical, embodied presence. At the beginning of the story, the narrator is overjoyed by being misread as local; and at the end, he misreads the nonwhite cowboys. In the initial misreading, the narrator is misread by Hiraki, the store owner, presumably because of his racially mixed appearance. But that misreading

occurs after several apparently sustained interactions between the narrator and Hiraki. This fact is carefully alluded to in the second paragraph of the story. The narrator explains, “Before I left for the store, my wife said to me: “Now don’t dawdle [. . .] You know how you like to dawdle in there” (87). Later, he references other conversations he has had with Haraki, suggesting that Haraki has significantly more information besides physical appearance by which to estimate his cultural origins and that there might be other commonalities that align him with locally-born Asian Americans. Though the narrator seems to default to race as the overriding interpretive framework, it proves impossible to identify the specific means by which Haraki arrives at the sense, however mistaken, that the narrator is Hawaiian born.

“Hawaiian Cowboys” illustrates the necessity for a more nuanced understanding of how expansion into the Pacific has shaped Asian American racialization, including how it informs current constructions of mixed race in the national discourse more broadly. A crucial component of building such an understanding stems from greater consideration with regard to the interconnectedness of mixed race Asian American identity across the Pacific.

His experience at the diner is the last provocation that causes the narrator finally to wish to leave Hawai`i. Earlier, he suggested that both he and his wife feel “as if the place is tugging at [them], asking [them] to stay” (98). Posing the question of why the narrator does not “derive satisfaction from the Hawaiian

cowboys and see them as the desirable fruition of cultural mixing,” Lee offers the explanation:

An Asian man donning cowboy apparel in Hawai`i, where such coalescing is not contested by dominant cultural norms, is less problematic than a similar construct on the mainland due to the different racial and cultural contexts. In this regard, the cowboys force the narrator to concede that in ‘looking for answers’ it is not enough that he is part Asian--he is not ‘local’. (244)

As Lee asserts, the image of the cowboy signifies differently in the Hawaiian context. Beyond the cowboy signifying differently, Asian American racialization circulates differently in the milieu of the islands. That difference is due to a number of important factors--not the least of which is the influence of indigenous Hawaiian culture--but is also in some significant degree due to the narratives of expansionism constructed beginning more than a century prior when, as the narrator states, “the west was being won by some and lost by others.” Figured as a lodestone with which to guide the United States’ racial project, Hawai`i was celebrated as a racial paradise in which Asians demonstrably became Americans after a fashion sanctioned by mainstream American culture. This construction not only provided a rationalization for the United States’ westward expansion into the Pacific, countering the reservations of southern democrats, but it also circumscribed a space of containment for Asian Americans and mixed race people. This effort at containment continues to reverberate in how continental

Asian Americans are cast vis-à-vis Hawaiian-born Asian Americans in mainstream American discourse, and that sensibility is reflected in the conflict referenced earlier between the narrator and the cab driver on Oahu. Recalling that the cab driver prompted him repeatedly to visit Pearl Harbor, the narrator attempts to explain his frustration regarding the suggestion as follows: “A Japanese man in his early sixties tells me that I should go to Pearl Harbor. For what? Does that mean he’s more American or something?” (Yau, 93). The narrator’s sensitivity to the implication that a Hawaiian-born Asian American might assert a superior claim to American identity than a continental-born Asian American could be read simply as a manifestation of excess anxiety stemming from his troubled identity as a mixed race Asian American; however, whatever anxiety the narrator might have about his racial status dovetails all too well with Hawai`i’s construction as a place “out there” for Asians who are also more “legitimate” Americans.

To be sure, Hawai`i has been and continues to be cast as an exotic land on the margins of the United States despite its accessibility to middle class vacationers. The persistence of this belief into the twenty-first century is demonstrated in political pundit Cokie Roberts’ 2008 comments admonishing Barack Obama, who had vacationed in his home state during his first run for the presidency, not to be seen travelling to such a “foreign, exotic place” while attempting to sway continental voters. To this, Senator Daniel Akaka responded meaningfully: “Saying our 50th state is somehow ‘foreign,’ does a great

disservice to the hard working, patriotic Americans who call Hawaii home”; and Representative Neil Abercrombie responded dismissively: “She's a bit of a fool that's the only thing you can say” (qtd. in Millican). While Roberts' comments demonstrate how Hawai`i as a state continues to be marginalized as a quasi-foreign cousin to the lower forty-eight, Asian Americans in the islands have been conspicuously situated by mainstream continental American discourse as more properly American than their continental counterparts whose racialization is characterized by being regularly marked as foreign regardless of nativity. Briefly stated, Asian American embodiment often signifies foreign identity on the continent but local identity in Hawai`i. A similar dynamic holds true for the racially mixed. Beyond deploying the image of the mixed race subject as part of an expansionist agenda, Skwiot notices another insidious aspect of the midcentury discourse around race mixing in Hawai`i. Statehood advocates, according to Skwiot, “relegated biological miscegenation to the domestic spheres of family, home, or school” (179). For while the “incorporation of a mixed race and multi-racial Hawai`i into the union would enable the United States to disavow racism at home and abroad,” there remained the sense that race mixing should remain unique to Hawai`i and that “interracial marriage and procreation was not a model for the mainland to adopt” (185). Hawai`i's distance from the continent, it seems, made the idealization of its racially mixed population more palatable because it could be more easily contained within the waters of the Pacific. This conjoining of celebration and containment in representations of mixed race in Hawai`i which

began during the Cold War period must be taken into account in contemporary discussions of Asian American mixed race. It takes little imagination to construe how such a construction enables both the hegemonic whiteness of American identity on the one hand and the fetishization of the “Aloha State” on the other.

Fetishizing Hawai`i as the ideal outcome of Manifest Destiny had implications for other nonwhite groups in addition to Asian Americans and Native Hawaiians. Indeed, in her discussion of James Michener’s writing about Hawai`i, Christina Klein argues the following:

Michener constructs the Asian Americans of Hawaii as reasonable figures who will mediate the highly charged and long-simmering racial conflicts between blacks and whites. Part of the value of Hawaii’s statehood, then, becomes its ability to smooth over racial divisions within the nation by interjecting Asian Americans as a third term between the poles of black and white. (250)

In fact, Klein asserts that “Michener specifically constructed Hawaii as an alternative to Little Rock,” which had already come to symbolize the intensity of the racial animus of the period (250). Michener’s stance reveals how the frontier came to be envisioned as simultaneously extant on multiple fronts despite Turner’s interpretation of the closing of the frontier at the end of the nineteenth century. Later historians would argue that Turner’s analysis of the frontier and the making of American individualism had always been more properly a fantasy, whose allure stems in part from its convergence with notions of American

exceptionalism, than an accurate depiction of the workings of the geographical space of the frontier and the psychology of those who resided on the edges of “civilization.” As such, the frontier remains mobile, and in fact, “the representation of expansion and the frontier had an equally profound and, perhaps more sustained, impact on American society than actual expansion and the real frontier” (Kushner, par. 14). Just what sites constitute the next frontier might change but the “familiar definition of the frontier as a zone of open opportunity” persists, argues Patricia Limerick, who has long been a vocal critic of Turner’s thesis (75). Limerick indicates that this sentiment of the frontier is crystallized in John F. Kennedy’s 1960 speech accepting the democratic nomination for president. Responding to the notion “that all the horizons have been explored-- that all the battles have been won-- that there is no longer an American frontier,” Kennedy asserts that “the problems are not all solved and the battles are not all won--and we stand today on the edge of a New Frontier.” This frontier contains “unknown opportunities and perils-- a frontier of unfulfilled hopes and threats.” The frontier, it seems, can be anywhere; Kennedy’s speech indicates a number of its locations:

But I tell you the New Frontier is here, whether we seek it or not. Beyond that frontier are the uncharted areas of science and space, unsolved problems of peace and war, unconquered pockets of ignorance and prejudice, unanswered questions of poverty and surplus. It would be easier to shrink back from that frontier, to look

to the safe mediocrity of the past, to be lulled by good intentions and high rhetoric--and those who prefer that course should not cast their votes for me, regardless of party.

Of the frontiers identified in Kennedy's speech, only one, outer space, would fit the frontier's most literal definition as a sparsely populated area while the others he references are mental, economic, political, and/or ideological frontiers. While these references would seem to be unmoored from physical or geographical space, a contemporary audience would surely have understood some of these figurative frontiers to allude to concrete events and places. Among those, I would like to focus in the following section on Kennedy's evocation of civil rights issues in the phrase "unconquered pockets of ignorance and prejudice." At the time, the phrase would have prompted the remembrance of relatively recent events such as those surrounding Montgomery Bus Boycotts and Little Rock. The image of fifteen-year-old Elizabeth Eckford walking stoically onto the campus of Little Rock Central High School surrounded by an angry white mob made undeniable the continuing problem of white racial aggression. Conquering the frontier of racial "ignorance and prejudice" is an ideological project, but that project is carried out to a significant degree by nonwhite "pioneers" asserting their right to exist unharmed in white physical spaces.

Pioneer Turned Prophet

A little over a decade later after Kennedy gave his “New Frontier” speech, the idea of the nonwhite racial frontiersman would re-emerge as the champion of non-confrontational racial politics, entering the broader national consciousness via the figure of Kwai Chang Caine. Caine was the mixed race protagonist of the markedly popular 1970’s television series *Kung Fu*, which has notably been termed the first “eastern western.” In the series, set in the American west in the middle part of the nineteenth century, Caine comes to the United States to flee retaliation from the Chinese emperor after killing one of his family members. In China, Caine had been a Shaolin monk, and the series finds many occasions for him to make use of both his martial arts and religious training. As a mixed race subject, Caine is the embodiment of the show’s goal of blending eastern and western traditions. In Jane Naomi Iwamura’s study of western representations of Asian religions, *Virtual Orientalism*, she argues, “The success of the program is undoubtedly due to the novel ways it transformed the fading genre of the television Western to reflect the outlook of a new generation” (113). According to Iwamura, *Kung Fu*’s audience was able to identify with Caine’s eastern philosophy because it spoke to the bohemian sensibilities of the early 1970’s and melded it with the familiar formula of the Western. Iwamura’s discussion also productively connects the content of the series to the racial and cultural tensions percolating as the country emerged from the turbulence of the 1960’s. In response to growing cultural nationalist movements, which “did not simply seek recognition in the political sphere” but rather “demanded full acknowledgement of

racial minorities in all areas of life,” the show “offered itself as an expression of these larger conflicts and provided a singular vision of how these conflicts could be overcome” (122). As an episodic program, the show tends to present similarly constructed variations on this theme of racial healing in which Caine mediates and diffuses racial tensions. In this way, the show mirrors on small scale the manner that Hawai`i’s Asian American and mixed race population was positioned as an intermediary between African Americans and white Americans during debates about statehood.

One episode that illustrates the positioning of mixed race people relative to other monoracial nonwhite races especially well is “The Stone,” which appeared at the end of the series’ first season. In this episode, Caine walks down the street of an unnamed dusty western town, noticing three small boys and looking at them with a paternalistic smile. This moment of relative peace is interrupted by the tumbling expulsion of three white men from a saloon--a familiar plot convention of the western--just as Caine is immediately outside the saloon’s swinging doors. The accidental collision results in the largest of the men threatening Caine to stay out of their way lest he make “chop suey” of him. Caine avoids further conflict through his characteristic deference and passivity. He then turns to notice a well-dressed black Brazilian man, Isaac Montoya, arriving in town in a stagecoach, a scene that prompts the animosity of three white male ruffians. Disdainful of the apparently affluent black man, the three men refer to him as a “monkey” and approach the traveller, sarcastically offering to assist him

with his luggage as a means of provocation. When Montoya refuses their “help,” a fight ensues. Also watching the spectacle are three little boys who appear to be attempting to identify which man is the better fighter because, as is revealed later in the episode, they want to have another man killed who wronged their mother by leaving her at the altar. Demonstrating knowledge of the martial art Capoeira, Montoya bests the three white men, but when one of them pulls a gun, Caine is compelled to intervene. In this narrative, the mixed race Asian American subject’s intervention in the altercation is technically voluntary (Caine could have walked away) but morally compulsory (to prevent the shooting of an innocent man).

A common theme across episodes of *Kung Fu* is Caine’s need to stave off the violence of white aggressors against other nonwhite victims long enough for an appeal to the authority of the law to be made. The notion that the law is reliable and fair even if “the wheels of justice turn slowly” is repeatedly woven into the plotline in the form of the unapologetically tardy sheriff. After the fight, the three boys remain in the safety of their hiding place beneath Montoya’s stagecoach and continue to observe the exchanges between the men. Having subdued the white men, Caine and Montoya look meaningfully at one another while the camera zooms in for a closeup. The sheriff finally arrives after peace is restored through the joint efforts of Montoya and Caine. One of the defeated white men, Quade, who happens to be the sheriff’s cousin, then threatens to kill Montoya, prompting the sheriff to order the white men to be held in prison for the

night to prevent additional violence. As he walks away, the sheriff takes a moment for some self-promotion: “Okay folks you can go home now; law and order has been restored here by Sheriff Jackson--don’t forget that when election comes up next month.” The sheriff glibly takes credit for the restoration of “law and order” that was obviously preserved by Caine and Montoya. In this way, the show winks at the belated appearance of the law and recognizes the frustration of minorities who in the interim must bear the brunt of violence from lawless white men.

The promise of a better society is held out in the figures of the three young boys who observe the altercation; they represent a worldview unencumbered by racial prejudice. While the three boys watch the conflict to try and discern which of the men is the superior fighter, they initially think the largest of the white men to be the best fighter--before they see Montoya fight using Capoeira. Once Caine joins in the fight, the children declare, “He’s even better!,” implying that they had temporarily ranked Montoya at the top until Caine joined in and revealed his mastery of kung fu. In the representation of the children, the opening scene sets up the potential for an ideal race-blind society. As they shift their estimation of who is the superior fighter according to observed ability, the children provide a model for a meritocratic system *Kung Fu* wishes to promote.

In Caine’s interaction with Zolly, the man who reneged on his promise to marry the three boys’ mother, the episode provides an implicit commentary on the growing interest in cultural nationalism which “did not necessarily adopt the

pacifist means of protest espoused by Martin Luther King Jr. but entertained approaches that were more direct and confrontational” (Iwamura, 122). After the fight is resolved and the group of men disperse, the boys approach Caine to offer him a few dollars to “kill a piano player named Zolly.” Surprised by the violent request from such small children, Caine attempts to uncover what prompted it. Eventually, the children explain that they had travelled to the town to have Zolly killed but that their motivation is not vengeance but to prevent their mother from murdering him herself; she apparently swore to kill him on the day of the thwarted wedding. With this understanding, Caine locates Zolly, an Armenian immigrant, and learns that he decided not to marry the children’s mother because he feels he “must stay free” to return to Armenia “to fight injustice, cruelty.” Caine responds by urging Zolly to focus his energies on his new homeland and states, “Injustice, cruelty are everywhere; you can fight them here.” Caine later attempts to explain to the children Zolly’s motivations: “He has a dream, an old dream.” Caine’s characterization of the impetus for Zolly’s behavior clearly echoes Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech and suggests that Zolly’s desire to fight in Armenia, however righteous, abandons a progressive dream in favor of a retrogressive “old dream.”

Abandoning cultural nationalism, according to “The Stone,” is necessary for solidarity among nonwhite groups, but the text also suggests relinquishing individual interests is crucial as well. Montoya’s self-interest is shown to impede the ability of the three nonwhite men to challenge the injustice perpetrated by the

white men. It is eventually revealed that Montoya had been in possession of a large diamond he stole from a mine in Brazil where his family had been enslaved for generations. He unknowingly dropped the diamond during the scuffle that took place in the beginning of the episode, and at that time, the smallest of the three boys surreptitiously picks it up. As Montoya goes looking for the diamond among the three white men who had been taken to jail by the sheriff, he requests help from the sheriff in searching the men, which the sheriff agrees to do but not until the following day. In response, Montoya shouts, "I demand your help now!" In this demand for a speedy response from the sheriff, Montoya exposes his lack of understanding of one of the precepts advocated by *Kung Fu*: minorities should wait patiently for the juridical process to play out. To Montoya's demand, the sheriff responds, "That's what I get for trying to treat you fair like a man." Montoya is understandably angered by the dehumanizing comment and declares "I am a man!" as he pushes the sheriff back, knocking him down and accidentally killing him. Montoya quickly departs determined to track down his diamond, and the next time he appears he is attempting to rescue one of the boys who had fallen into a pit of quicksand. Hearing the commotion, Caine and Zolly arrive to find Montoya struggling in the quicksand as well. For a few moments the three men, Montoya, Caine, and Zolly, all work together in an effort to extract the boy, but then Montoya, who at this point believes Caine has taken his diamond, indicates that he thinks Caine would prefer to see him sink into the quicksand. Their momentary unity is further dismantled as Zolly decides it would be best if he were

to run and retrieve a rope to aid in the rescue. Caine, the one character certain of the value of brotherhood, cries after him, "No, I need you here!" Their alliance is thus short-lived, but the potential for a cross-racial alliance is established as a goal. It remains unmet because of the pursuit of individual interests (Montoya) and extranational interests (Zolly), which "The Stone" intimates must be discarded.

Montoya goes through a transformation akin to that of a religious conversion as he comes to have faith in the promise that his rights will indeed be protected by the law. This "conversion" takes place in the boys' home where Caine and Zolly travel to return the boys to their mother. Montoya, lying in wait inside the home, then reappears. Still believing Caine has taken his diamond, Montoya pulls a gun on the group, which creates a pause in the action that allows for his confession:

Do you think I started out intending to steal a diamond or to kill another human being? All I wish was opportunity to do all that my mind and body were capable of doing. Only then I discovered that that was not the way for the son of a slave to think even after he had educated himself beyond his masters.

Following this confession, Montoya threatens to shoot Caine if he does not return the diamond, which results in a raucous fight scene between the two skilled martial artists. While they are busy fighting, Quade enters the home with his gun drawn and threatens to kill Montoya in the name of justice for "murdering" his

cousin. Caine, unswerving in his belief in the wheels of justice, admonishes Quade saying, “Does not your justice demand a trial?” Zolly then steps in to testify to the importance of the law: “Stop! This is not Armenia! These men have rights!” Once again, the sheriff arrives only after the conflict is nearly resolved, and Montoya is consequently handed over to the sheriff to be tried. Though Montoya has no empirical evidence that a trial will result in justice for a him as black man in mid-nineteenth century America, Montoya appears moved by Caine and Zolly’s intercession on his behalf such that he is now suddenly reassured by the promise of a trial; he leaves smiling as though confident that the former sheriff’s death will be ruled an accident and he will be found innocent.

Although individual interests are discounted in “The Stone,” the cross-racial alliances it advocates are played out on an interpersonal level. Indeed, individualizing racial politics is a pervasive theme of the series (Iwamura, 127). This perspective is most clearly evidenced in the relationship between Zolly and the woman he was meant to marry, Martha. Zolly and Martha now reconcile, and Zolly asks Martha to marry him. Incredulous, she queries whether he wants to be married even if he “may never go back to Armenia.” In other words, his allegiance to her and to the United States is conflated, and his connection to Armenia is viewed as menacing both. He explains that he has “just gone back--to fight injustice anywhere is to fight it everywhere,” echoing the statement “[i]njustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” penned by Martin Luther King Jr. in his “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” Being of Armenian descent, Zolly

would have been white by the standards of 1970's United States' racial classification, but it is clear that he is meant to be read as other than white. Zolly is played by Gregory Sierra, an actor of Puerto Rican descent who had previously been predominantly cast in Latino roles. The immigrant status of both he and Martha, an Irish immigrant who is played by the fair-skinned, blue-eyed Kelly Jean Peters, further underscores the show's attempt to represent their union as crossing significant cultural and racial boundaries. The episode concludes showing Zolly marrying Martha with Caine in attendance, indicating the belief that interpersonal interracial relationships should be at the center of progressive racial politics.

Kung Fu picks up the narrative thread from expansionist arguments about mixed race and Asian American subjects able to embody American ideals despite their racialization and weaves it into a reimagined frontier in which its central character braves a hostile white wilderness. In doing so, he exposes the regressive racial attitudes of dominant white culture and proselytizes the message of passive patience and faith in juridical processes among nonwhite people. Caine's mixed race Asian American identity evokes the aforementioned Cold War notions that circulated around debates of Hawaiian statehood while also affirming the primacy of the individual, as a racially mixed Asian American in the 1970's would have been viewed by a mainstream audience as an entirely unique identity. His biracial existence is crudely posited as a rebuke to the cultural nationalist movements of the time.

Resignifying the Frontier

Nina Revoyr's *Wingshooters* demonstrates an understanding of the complex landscape of the frontier for the mixed race Asian American subject and attempts to engage the competing meanings of the frontier as it lives in the imagination of dominant American culture versus that of marginalized groups. If *Kung Fu* attempted to give minorities access to the promises afforded by the frontier (provided that they patiently assert their grievances in a prescribed non-confrontational manner exemplified by the mixed race subject), then *Wingshooters* aims to lay bare how that access remains frequently barred. The novel resists both the popularly accepted characterization of the frontier as a space of limitless opportunity as it additionally interrogates the usefulness of placing the mixed race subject at the vanguard in penetrating the "unconquered pockets of ignorance and prejudice" about which Kennedy spoke. The frontier myth, in which white settlers are said to conquer the "uncharted wilderness," erases the presence of indigenous populations, nonwhite settlers, as well as settlers from other nations; or more properly, it makes those populations indistinguishable from the wilderness, both of which need to be subdued under the control of white American trailblazers. *Wingshooters*, set in Deerhorn, Wisconsin in 1974, redefines the idea of the frontier from the perspective of the minority subject. Revoyr's text problematizes how revised frontier myths place onto nonwhite pioneers the responsibility of transforming the hostile white frontier

into a democratically inclusive space. The year in which the novel is set is also a year that saw its own version of Little Rock in the form of the Boston busing crisis--a controversy that indicated how much work was still left to do. Michelle LeBeau, a mixed race Asian American girl arrives in Deerhorn to live with her white grandparents. As the town's first nonwhite resident, her presence troubles the other community members, whose disdain for her is only mildly blunted by her grandfather's prominence as one of Deerhorn's most respected leaders. The novel casts the minority subject who attempts to join circumscribed all-white communities as a pioneer entering hostile territory. Narratives created about the dangerous "untamed" space of the frontier encountered by white settlers offered compensation in the form of the promise of economic gain and social ascendance, and in the process of reaping those benefits, democracy is expanded and renewed. But for the nonwhite subject, the hope, Revoyr's text suggests, is merely to survive this wilderness rather than transform it into a legitimately democratic space for all people regardless of race.¹

As a descendant of a respected family who had lived in Deerhorn for generations, it would seem that Michelle ought to enjoy privileged status among its inhabitants, but that does not prove to be the case. Her grandfather, Charlie, beloved by his community, is a fixture of Deerhorn life. Though a talented

¹ Stephen Hong Sohn provides an extended discussion of *Wingshooters* as a proto-queer survival plot in the chapter "Inscrutable Belongings in Hunting: Interracial Surrogacies in Nina Revoyr's *Wingshooters*" of *Inscrutable Belongings: Queer Asian North American Fiction*.

baseball player and skilled marksman in his youth, Charlie is primarily respected--not for these traditionally masculine capabilities--for his social adroitness.

Michelle explains, “[I]t wasn’t his skill with weapons that set Charlie apart” but rather “the way that other people related to him” (15). “Men gathered around him” in order “to hear him expound on everything from the proper training of hunting dogs to the town’s new traffic light; women lowered their eyes and blushed when he was near” (15). The town’s devotion was “paid back and increased” by Charlie “in a thousand small ways” such as “by changing tires or plowing sidewalks for the widows in town; by welcoming unattached men into his house for Friday suppers; by taking young boys to the baseball fields to work on their games, or out in the deepest woods to hunt (15-16). Charlie’s ability to identify and meet the needs of others, his ability to nurture those around him, is that which draws the admiration of the small rural town. Because the townspeople could not punish Michelle’s absent father for marrying her Japanese mother and because they “wouldn’t dare to punish Charlie” they instead “focused their displeasure” on Michelle. Though only an eight-year-old child, “people glared and sometimes swore” at her; she was additionally subject to physical violence when older boys would use her for “target practice,” mostly throwing apples “but sometimes rocks.” The origin of the town’s antipathy toward Michelle is her racial identity. Her mother “was the first non-Caucasian person they’d ever laid eyes on,” and they believed Michelle’s presence “was inflicting on them the terrible fruit” of her father’s “sins” (22). Michelle functions as a repository for the varied anxieties

about changing race relations occurring outside the boundaries of Deerhorn that the town members work to stave off.

As abhorrent as the town's treatment of Michelle's is, her patrilineage provides some protection, however minimal, from the town's most racist impulses. This fact becomes apparent when a black couple, the Garretts, move to Deerhorn, aggravating the the racial tensions already emerging consequent to Michelle's arrival. Having "never been home to a soul who wasn't white" before Michelle came to town, Deerhorn inhabitants found the impending appearance of a black couple to be "as dramatic and inconceivable as a deer starting to speak or a flock of ducks flying backwards" (38).

In other words, while Michelle's presence is a reminder of a "sin," having a black couple amongst them constitutes a wholesale violation of the natural order. The world outside Deerhorn was changing, and its residents seek to keep those changes from affecting life in their insular town. The "Garrett's presence," Michelle considers, "must have been troubling and surreal" given that the "civil rights movement had never reached Deerhorn" (168). Unsurprisingly, the townspeople hold a number of stereotypical beliefs about their new neighbors who, because of their blackness, were expected to be "lazy and ignorant" and to eventually "run afoul of the law" compelled by a "basic nature" inclining them toward lawlessness (38). But the Garretts, married and educated, exemplify the demands of middle class propriety in every way--except, of course, for their racial identity. Interestingly enough, the Garrett's respectability is an integral

component of why the residents of Deerhorn find them so threatening. With regard to this point, Stephen Hong Sohn offers a productive analysis:

The queerness of the Garrets emerges in the very fact of their seemingly upper-middle class marriage--their occupations as teacher and as nurse alongside their blackness strike anomalously, evidence of a transgressive heterosexual power base altering the racial makeup of Deerhorn domestic life. Their respectability undermines racial stereotypes, but this very shift in character affirms a different yet equally problematic abnormality: their marital stability and professional obligations together gesture to a mode of racial ascension that connote their status as usurpers. (172)

The Garretts' precise display of respectability is that which makes their presence in Deerhorn especially odious; of notable interest here is the manner in which the Garrett's proximity to idealized gender roles is interpreted by the townspeople as a threat while the men in Michelle's life are allowed a degree of gender fluidity. Michelle explains, "In my family, it was the men who were nurturers" (Revoyr, 105). Charlie, Deerhorn's informal leader, secures that position by attending to the needs of the town, by being a nurturer rather than through more traditional masculine displays of strength and dominance. White racialization thus tempers gender codes, while nonwhite racialization renders their proper execution impossible.

The Garretts exemplariness generated some criticism in reviews of *Wingshooters*. *Kirkus Reviews*, for instance, notes how “these characters—the woman a nurse, the husband a substitute teacher—are somewhat one dimensional” though still finding the Garretts “sympathetic and believable” In a similar vein, The *L.A. Times* asserts that “the somewhat stereotyped nobility of the Garretts is a flaw in *Wingshooters*.” The novel, though, directs the reader’s attention to what appears to be this oversimple representation of its only black characters. Reflecting on her feelings about the Garretts, adult Michelle describes her sentiment at the time:

I fully realize that behind the image they projected, they could both have been rife with faults and imperfections. I will never know why they were beyond my limited perceptions, and in not knowing, I realize that my picture of them will always be incomplete. It’s a picture I’ve burnished to an improbable sheen because I knew them when I was a child, because they were good to me, because I see them through the lens of time and sadness. (184-5)

Michelle is aware of the “improbable sheen” her memory has bestowed on the Garretts, and the text overtly draws the reader’s attention to it. I would thus argue the unidimensional representation of the Garretts is a purposeful construction meant to demonstrate the notable significance of race in determining social position and to challenge the notion that wide-scale change in racialized social structure can be instigated by dispatching select romanticized “pioneers” whose

demonstration of middle class respectability is expected to assuage white anxiety.

The manner in which Michelle idealizes the Garretts can also be read as a compensatory reaction to her sense of guilt because their suffering proffered Mikey some temporary relief from the town's racial animosity. For while Michelle was troubled by the way "everyone was reacting to the new teacher," the Garretts' presence also attracted "so much of the town's attention" that Michelle was "glared at less frequently." For enjoying the respite, Michelle confesses to feeling "ashamed" (56). In Michelle's differential treatment following the Garrett's arrival, *Wingshooters* acknowledges the problematic way that the mixed race subject can benefit from the denigration of monoracial, especially black, minorities whose presence is viewed by dominant white society as less tolerable than that of the partially white.

We witness the inability of the racial pioneer, whether monoracial or mixed, to change the status quo in Michelle's relationship with her grandfather, Charlie. More than any person in her life, Charlie expresses love for Michelle. "In his eyes," Michelle states, "I was good enough, complete, and worthy of his love, just as I already was." Even into adulthood, only Charlie "looked at [her] with such obvious delight" (244). Nonetheless, the love Charlie exhibits for his granddaughter does virtually nothing to alter his views on race. Although "it enraged him that the town did not embrace" Michelle, he "wasn't shy about using racial epithets, or blaming blacks or Jews or Democrats for all the country's

problems.” Michelle puts it bluntly stating, “Let me make this very clear--my grandfather was a bigot” (23). Charlie’s continuing bigotry becomes most evident in the way he responds to the treatment of the Garretts. After accusations of physical abuse are levied against Earl, one of Charlie’s closest friends, he incorrectly assumes the person who reported him to be one of the Garretts. Accordingly, Earl heads out to exact retribution; as Mr. Garrett is out of town, Earl ultimately kidnaps and murders Mrs. Garrett. Earl also threatens to kill Michelle, who, when chasing after her dog, happens upon the gruesome scene of Earl in the forest preparing to burn Mrs. Garrett’s body. After Charlie arrives and discovers Earl with his gun trained on Mikey, he shoots Earl in an effort to protect her. Although Charlie is willing to kill his longtime friend to protect his racially mixed granddaughter, he views Mrs. Garrett’s murder callously. “He was not avenging them or defending them or punishing Earl,” Michelle explains, “he didn’t think about the Garretts at all.” For Michelle, the Garretts’ inconsequentiality in her grandfather’s estimation is “unbearable because Mrs. Garrett’s death meant as little to him as the deaths of the deer he had hunted” (241). Caring for a racially mixed child does not soften Charlie toward other people of color. Similarly, the Garretts’ respectability does not stem the flow of racial animosity in Deerhorn; it cannot shield them from the violence directed at them. The novel reveals how the racial pioneer, even when irreproachable, simply cannot singlehandedly “civilize” racist members of mainstream white society merely through the proximity of her unalloyed respectability.

The continual movement of the frontier is, in its rendering by mainstream American culture, a sign of progress toward the realization of Manifest Destiny. *Wingshooters* aims to trouble this link between movement and progress by linking movement to escape for the mixed race subject. Michelle is in perpetual motion throughout the novel, constantly exploring the woods with her dog, Brett, or crisscrossing the town on her bicycle. She communicates a special appreciation for being in open space “where there are no other people” (63). But the allure of open spaces stems not just from the natural beauty afforded by the Wisconsin countryside; for Michelle, avoiding people means avoiding the threat of racialized violence. Her close relationship with Brett is undergirded by his ability to ensure her safety. Brett provides her companionship, of course, but she confesses, “There was another reason I liked to have Brett around, and that was for my own protection.” Michelle recounts how Brett once chased home a boy who had been harassing her, “grabbing a mouthful of the boy’s shirt for good measure” (62). The need for constant movement persists into Michelle’s adulthood. As an adult, she moves to California under the pretense of locating her parents (i.e., creating a sense of family and home), yet she reveals she really “came to get away” (245). Movement reduces the likelihood of being attacked in *Wingshooters* and provides a mechanism for escape rather than progress.

And there is much in the text that gestures toward an absence of progress with regard to race relations. The novel’s title alludes to Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* in a way that adds to the sense of oppressive stagnation. Little has

changed in rural America, it seems, in the forty years' difference between the two stories' settings. The town members' treatment of Michelle and the Garretts is strongly shaped by events that are conceived of as exterior and foreign to Deerhorn, but the adult Michelle recognizes that those events were not actually distant from her life in Deerhorn at all but rather intimately tied to her treatment there. For example, Michelle describes how the "sight of buses full of black children being pelted with rocks" and "of the Irish city councilwoman speaking of the coming race war" broadcast on television seemed as distant to her "as the images of the disgraced president stepping off his plane, of the bombings in Cambodia" (93). The town, "unsettled" by "all the changes going on in the country," reacts by working to ensure these changes do not penetrate Deerhorn. Insofar as the violence the town enacts on Michelle and the Garretts is heightened by their fear of these changes, the outside world actually determines the violent events that take place in Deerhorn. Yet the novel suggests the residents of Deerhorn do have some success in maintaining the illusion that the town is untouched by outside forces. After the horror of Mrs. Garrett's murder, Deerhorn "returned to some semblance of normal," and Mr. Garrett's "departure was as complete and permanent as his wife's" (233). Michelle, traumatized by the Garrett's death and her grandfather's passing soon after, significantly stops speaking (she cannot provide a counternarrative) and is banished to a home for troubled children on the edge of town. Once she is emancipated, she leaves and

never returns. The presence of these racial pioneers and the egregious tragedy they experienced in Deerhorn leave the town seemingly unchanged.

As an adult, Michelle lives in Los Angeles, and even a multiracial city like Los Angeles, her mixed race identity gives her no special leverage in managing race relations. If anything, her white rural upbringing makes her suspect. While driving through Central California “with a woman who was trying to love” her, Michelle stops to observe a field trial. Disturbed by Michelle’s interest in guns and hunting, the woman quips that she had forgotten Michelle is “half-Japanese and half-redneck.” But this story only reaffirms the lesson Michelle had already learned from Charlie: interpersonal relationships, even those based on a profound sense of love, cannot alone surmount the weight of race.

That the idea of the frontier is a significant part of American identity construction almost goes without saying; the vast amount of scholarship that has been produced on the topic beginning with the year the Census Bureau declared the frontier closed and continuing into the present is a testament to that significance. Yet there remains much to be said about the precise way the frontier signifies for different groups alongside and in contrast to its signification within dominant culture. Consideration of the frontier myth is especially crucial in tracing the racial formation of mixed race subjects in the United States since it has, as I have attempted to demonstrate, played a meaningful if not central role in situating the meaning of mixed race within the national imagination. Likewise, the idea of race mixing has shaped how America has conceived of itself and its

boundaries both literal and figurative. The mixed race Asian American writers I have discussed, however, illustrate that those dominant constructions are not determinant.

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