"A Plumb Craving for the Other Color":

White Men, Non-White Women, and Sexual Crisis in Antebellum America

By

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Abstract

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"'A Plumb Craving for the Other Color': White Men, Non-White Women, and Sexual Crisis in Antebellum America" examines interracial relations between white men and non-white women in the antebellum period. Focusing on black, Indian, and Spanish American women, this dissertation argues that such liaisons were far more prevalent, institutionalized, and tolerated than historians have previously argued. Although such phenomena as black concubines, tribally organized Indian marriages, and land-rich Mexican wives have been separately examined, no single study has put them together and questioned their particular prevalence at a specific time in American history. This dissertation argues that the relationships white men formed with non-white women follow certain patterns that evidence a sexual "crisis" in antebellum America.

Taking evidence from court records, periodicals, diaries, letters, travelogues and fiction, this study reveals that non-white women and their relations with white men were often portrayed in astonishingly similar ways. Whether black, Indian, or Spanish American, the women were often described as darkly beautiful, sensuous and loving, passionate and loyal, almost slavishly submissive and domestic, and selflessly brave. The relationships, moreover, repetitively involved fantasies of total male power: full ownership of the female body, the possibility of polygamy, and the ease of divorce. Most importantly, the descriptions of both the liaisons and the women themselves starkly differed from the stereotypes surrounding white women and white marriage. This dissertation argues that the sexual crisis was thus specifically a "crisis of white femininity," wherein cultural stereotypes of virile white men, passionless white women, and hyper-sexual non-white women created a significant threat to stable white marriages.

Moreover, this study argues that the romanticization of such relations extended far beyond the men who contracted them: some of the period's most popular fiction involved fantasies of interracial love, pointing to a far more deep-seated fascination and desire within the American public than has hitherto been acknowledged. Each of the three races, therefore, is examined in two chapters: the first detailing the nature of actual liaisons, the second examining fictional fantasies. The final chapter and conclusion examine the possibility of a "backlash"—conscious or unwitting—by white women, and the fate of interracial unions in the whirlwind of change wrought by the political, social, economic, and cultural transformations of the late 19th century.

For boyo

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Introduction

In North Carolina in 1825, twelve-year old Harriet Jacobs became Dr. James Norcom's slave. He sexual harassed her for the next decade. "Do you know that I have a right to do as I like with you—that I can kill you, if I please?" her memoir recalled him saying when she refused him. "I can grind your bones to powder!" Other times, he was gentle and pleading. "I would cherish you," he insisted, "I would make a lady of you." He promised to build her a fine house of her own in a secluded area four miles from town, where she could live in comfort as his mistress. "No jealous lover ever watched a rival more closely than he watched me," Jacobs remembered.[1]

In southwestern Wyoming ten years later, Kit Carson fought a duel on horseback with a French-Canadian trapper. The trapper lost his thumb to Carson's bullet, and Carson won the hand of a sixteen-year-old Arapaho named Waa-Nibe, or "Singing Grass." Those were, he later told a friend, "the happiest days of my life."[2] Singing Grass, however, died soon after the birth of Carson's child, so he took a second wife. Seventeen-year-old "Making-Out-Road" was reportedly the "Belle of the Cheyennes." When, however, she learned that Carson had been having an affair with a Mexican woman, Antonia Luna, she divorced him in the Indian style—that is, she threw all of his belongings outside their lodge and took off after her tribe. No matter: a year later, in 1841, Carson met and soon married his third wife, a fourteen-year-old Mexican girl named Josefa Jaramillo.[3]

In a shop in Stockton, California ten years later, the young forty-niner Timothy Osborn fell "head and ears in love" with a gorgeous Chilean girl who pranced through the door. "Positively and without any exception, she was the most beautiful girl I ever saw!" he wrote enthusiastically in his diary. Casually dismissing his earlier, nostalgic references to beautiful New England girls he'd left behind, he announced "talk to me of 'American Belles' no longer, for my beau-ideal of perfect beauty is found at last!" Ensuing pages of his diary neglected to mention the previous queen of his fantasies, "dear Annie" of Martha's Vineyard, and admitted to stalking streets in a desperate search for his "inamorata incognita."[4]

All three of these men were of high-standing in their respective communities, which represented all three regions of the United States. The doctor was of a wealthy, professional southern class, Timothy was the son of middle-class New Englanders, and Kit Carson, though initially of a poor Missouri farming family, became one of the period's most famous and widely admired American frontiersmen. These were not men on the fringes of society. These were not

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[1] Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, ed. Lydia Maria Child (Boston: Published For The Author, 1861), 62, 91, 124. In her autobiography, Harriet Jacobs (whose real name was Linda Brent) gives her master the name "Dr. Flint." In reality, his name was Dr. Norcum. I chose to preserve Jacobs' pseudonym to ensure that the reader recognizes her famous literary identity, but decided to mention Dr. Flint's true name in order to emphasize the fact that he was a real person. Jean Fagan Yellin, ed., *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

[2] John S.C. Abbott, *Christopher Carson, Familiarly Known as Kit Carson* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1873), 343.

[3] For the histories of Carson's three wives, see Marc Simmons, *Kit Carson and His Three Wives: A Family History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003).

[4] Journal Entries from Jan 15, 17, 18, 1850, Timothy C. Osborn Journal, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. This diary was transcribed by Daniel Harris, May 1932, and titled *The Heart of a Forty-Niner: The Diary of Timothy Osborn*. The Bancroft Library holds both the original and the transcription of this unpublished manuscript.

poor, disgraced, or desperate men for whom white women were unattainable. And yet all three of these men either desired or engaged in sexual relations with non-white women. Furthermore, they were astonishingly open about their intentions, apparently taking for granted that their respective communities would condone them. Neither Jacobs' memoir, Carson's biographies, nor Timothy's diary reveal any kind of qualm about this behavior.

Finally, these men were not unique in their conduct. They are simply well-known examples of remarkably widespread patterns of interracial desire that persisted throughout the antebellum period.[5] This dissertation argues that white men of all regions, ages, and social classes in the antebellum period were fascinated and sexually excited by the prospect of miscegenation. Socially conditioned to view race as intrinsically related to behavior, white American men imagined a racial hierarchy in which darkness of skin, hair, and eye was an index to sexuality and "the passions." A kind of orientalism pervaded the American imagination, ascribing an eroticism and romanticism to women of different races. Black, Indian, and Spanish American women were the most numerous groups of non-white females in the antebellum United States, and thus the three this dissertation will focus upon. Each was assigned a specific niche in this complex racial rubric.[6]

This argument appears to contradict decades of established historiography that characterizes the antebellum period as imbued with an almost manic abhorrence of miscegenation. Political and legal decisions of the time certainly reflected this general view. Laws in almost every region, but especially the South, banned marriage between blacks and whites. Similar laws existed in a number of northern and western states against marriage between whites and Native Americans, and in 1830 the federal government evidenced its negative view of integration by passing the Indian Removal Act.[7] Many politicians during the Mexican-American War expressed revulsion at the notion of Mexican annexation and the resultant "mingling" of the

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[5] Timothy Osborn is not, of course, as well-known as Jacob's master or Kit Carson. However, he has been included because his diary contains one of the most frank and open discussions of sexual behavior during the Gold Rush.

[6] I realize that these designations may appear somewhat problematic to some readers. An explanation of terms is therefore necessary. I have chosen to refer to the first group of women as "black" for two main reasons: firstly, because their numbers included African-Americans, Africans, West Indies islanders, and other groups; secondly, because antebellum society—as will be seen in later chapters—grouped all people who possessed African "blood" under the single heading "black." The designation also serves to highlight contemporary beliefs that "black" was at the opposite pole of the racial spectrum than "white." I use the term "Indian" because, despite extensive scholarly use of the term "Native American," the native tribes of North America themselves have clearly voiced their desire to be referred to collectively as "Indians." I use the term "Spanish American" to encompass the peoples of the historically Spanish colonies. I use this term, rather than "Latin American," because my focus is solely on the Spanish colonies (particularly Mexico) rather than those of Portugal and France. Spain possessed the majority of land in North, Central, and South America, as well as several islands. Furthermore, my historical subjects were primarily coming into contact with Spanish Americans; in fact, they usually appeared unable or unwilling to acknowledge the existence of any other European presence in the southern countries. When referring to works by historians of Latin America who broadly focus on the entire region, I will nonetheless continue to use the term "Spanish American" (unless their titles and quotations specify otherwise) because I solely cite information relevant to those countries. Finally, I use the term "white" or "Anglo" to generally mean "Anglo-Saxon" Americans and Europeans. The term "American" refers specifically to citizens of the United States (or its territories); when referring to the peoples of Mexico or Central and South America, the term "Spanish American" is used.

[7] For statistics on anti-miscegenation laws, further detailed in Chapter Eight, see Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

white and "mongrel" races.[8] Publicly, then, white America appeared to have a stoic, self-righteous stance against interracial sex.

Yet a growing number of historians in the last two decades have been exposing the fault lines in this carefully constructed façade. One enduring historiographical interest since the 1960s has been an emphasis on social history, particularly the study of non-elite or marginalized groups, and a democratization of sources. The daily lives and individual experiences of men and women of all social classes can be pieced together from their diaries, letters, and other personal documents. The secrets revealed in these sources very often show that everyday realities completely contradicted public beliefs and policy. A growing part of antebellum southern historiography has revealed extensive interracial sex between white men and black women, and even between white women and black men.[9] A number of antebellum western histories have revealed a similar phenomenon on the frontier, where significant numbers of men indulged in marriages with multiple Indian women, either successively or simultaneously.[10] Rather than being reviled as "squaw men," many were wealthy, successful, and highly regarded frontier businessmen. Another growing genre of American studies focuses on antebellum imperialist ventures in Spanish America, paying particular attention to the Mexican-American War. These works not only reveal plentiful examples of affairs and marriages between Spanish American women and American traders, migrants, and soldiers, but even explicit talk at the political level

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[8] One Congressman, for example, argued that it would be impossible to assimilate "the mongrel, miserable population of Mexico—the Mexicans, Indians, Mulattoes [and] Mestizos." Quoted in Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: the Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1981), 242.

[9] For example, Joshua Rothman writes "Even if they never approved of it, white Virginians, like white Southerners elsewhere, tolerated and accommodated a wide array of sexual activity across the color line, ranging from viable and supportive interracial families to . . . rapes." Joshua Rothman, *Notorious in the Neighborhood: Sex and Families Across the Color Line in Virginia 1787—1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 5. Other books on this subject include: Clarence Walker, *Mongrel Nation: the America Begotten by Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009); Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1999); Catherine Clinton and Michelle Gillespie, *The Devil's Lane: Sex and Race in the Early South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Kirsten Firscher, *Suspect Relations: Sex, Race, and Resistance in Colonial North Carolina* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Martha Hodes, *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), and *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

[10] For example, Michael Lansing writes that "the fur companies unofficially embraced liaisons between their Euro-American employees and Native women" because they "wished to reap the economic benefits of Indian-white romance." Such relations were therefore "freely accept[ed] and support[ed]." Michael Lansing, "Plains Indian Women and Interracial Marriage in the Upper Missouri Trade, 1804-1868," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (Winter, 2000): 417. Other works on Anglo-Indian relations in the antebellum West include: Albert Hurtado, *Intimate Frontiers: Sex, Gender, and Culture in Old California* (Albuquerque: New Mexico Press, 1999); Theda Perdue, "*Mixed-Blood" Indians: Racial Construction in the Early South* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2003); Glenda Riley, *Building and Breaking Families in the American West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996); Simmons, *Kit Carson and His Three Wives*; William Swagerty, "Marriage and Settlement Patterns of Rocky Mountain Trappers," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (April 1980): 159-180; Elliot West, *The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 1998).

of "personal annexation"—in other words, sexual union—between the United States and Mexico.[11]

Finally, some historians and literary scholars have begun to note the prevalence of non-white women in antebellum literature.[12] The dawn of the nineteenth century witnessed a printing revolution, and reading material became accessible and affordable to almost every sector of the increasingly literate American population. Several studies have highlighted the sudden explosion of literary interest in the Puritan colonies, southern plantations, Aztec empire, western frontier, and Mexico—all convenient stages for the enactment of interracial dramas. Noble Pocahontases, magnificent African Queens, beautiful "tragic mulattoes,"[13] courageous Malinches, sparkling

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[11] Amy Greenberg writes that a number of American politicians and journalists encouraged the idea of "personal annexation," including Samuel Houston and William Swain, editor of the Philadelphia *Public Ledger.* Once America annexed Mexico, Swain insisted, "Our Yankee young fellows and the pretty *señorita*s will do the rest of the annexation, and Mexico will soon be Anglo-Saxonized, and prepared for the confederacy." Swain quoted in Amy Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Other works on the gendered nature of American imperialism in Latin America, and antebellum relations between Americans and Mexicans, include: Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*; Robert Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas: the Mexican War in the American Imagination* **(**New York : Oxford University Press, 1985); Woodrow Borah and Sherburne F. Cook, "Marriage and Legitimacy in Mexican Culture: Mexico and California," *California Law Review* 54, no. 2 (May, 1966): 946—1008; Rebecca McDowell Craver, *The Impact of Intimacy: Mexican-Anglo Intermarriage in New Mexico, 1821-1846* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1982); Jane Dysart, "Mexican Women in San Antonio, 1830-1860: The Assimilation Process," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (Oct., 1976): 365-375; Hurtado, *Intimate Frontiers*; Joan Jensen and Darlis Miller, *New Mexico Women: Intercultural Perspectives* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986); Janet Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn: The Upper Arkansas, 1832—1856* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978); Frederick Pike, *The United States and Latin America: Myths and Stereotypes of Civilization and Nature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992); Deborah Moreno, "'Here the Society is United': 'Respectable' Anglos and Intercultural Marriage in Pre-Gold Rush California, *California History*, 80, no. 1 (Spring, 2001): 2—17.

[12] Some of the primary books and articles on this subject include: for the "tragic mulatto" character, see Hugh M. Gloster, *Negro Voices in American Fiction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1948); Sterling Brown, *The Negro in American Fiction* (New York: Atheneum, 1969); John Herbert Nelson, *The Negro Character in American Fiction* (Lawrence, KA: Department of Journalism Press, 1926); Jules Zanger, "The 'Tragic Octoroon' In Pre-Civil War Fiction," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (Spring, 1966): 63-70; James Kinney, *Amalgamation! Race, Sex, and Rhetoric in the Nineteenth-Century American Novel* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985); Eve Allegra Raimon, *The "Tragic Mulatta" Revisited: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Antislavery Fiction* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004); for Indian women, see Robert Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1978); Rayna Green, "The Pocahontas Perplex: The Image of Indian Women in American Culture,"*The Massachusetts Review* 16, no. 4 (Autumn, 1975): 698-714; Jay B. Hubbell, "The Smith-Pocahontas Story in Literature," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 65, no. 3 (Jul., 1957): 275-300; Robert Tilton, *Pocahontas: The Evolution of an American Narrative* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); for Latin-American women, see Pike, *The United States and Latin America;* Johannsen, *To The Halls of the Montezumas;* Andrea Tinnemeyer, "Embodying the West: Lyrics from the U.S-Mexican War," *American Studies* 46 (Spring 2005): 67-86. Gabriele Pisarz-Ramírez, "Blurring the Boundaries of Gender: The Strong 'Spanish' Woman in Nineteenth-Century U.S. Popular Women's Writing," *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 53, no. 1, (2008): 57—75; James M. Lacy, "New Mexican Women in Early American Writings," *NMHR* 34 (January 1959): 41- 51; *Beverly Trulio,* "*Anglo American Attitudes toward New Mexican Women*," *Journal of the West* 12, no. 2 (1973): 229-39.

[13] The term "tragic mulatto," which will be discussed at length later in this dissertation, refers to the literary figure of a man or woman (though usually the latter) who exhibits almost all the qualities of "whiteness," but is exempt from white society, enslaved, or brought to suicide because of their "drop" of black blood. The term was coined by Sterling Brown in his book *The Negro in American Fiction*, and was used in a variety of American literature from the antebellum period onward.

Aztec princesses, and regal Mexican noblewomen were all staples of antebellum literature, from great writers like James Fenimore Cooper and Herman Melville to dime-novel sensationalists like Ned Buntline and James Holt Ingraham. In all of these, the non-white women were beautiful, alluring, romantic and excessively (though often unconsciously) erotic. Every work also contained one or several handsome, courageous, and virile white men through whom, I will argue, the fantasy of a reader's interracial desires could be played out.

While scholars in the fields of southern, western, Spanish American, and literary history have noted these trends in their respective regions and genres, none have yet linked the phenomena together. This project seeks to do so first by consolidating the existing historiography on interracial relations in all parts of the United States, and then by examining the literature—both non-fictional and fictional—that focused on this theme. In this way, I hope to reveal both the reality of widespread interracial sex in the antebellum period, and the *indirect* participation of white men who enacted fantasies of these affairs by reading literature that explicitly described them. Of course, a number of men at this time must also have entertained and acted upon homosexual interracial fantasies, especially within the sexually charged, homosocial atmosphere of the "sporting culture" that Chapter One will detail.[14] Nonetheless, the difficulty of locating a sexual practice that was generally kept carefully hidden, and the limitations of time and space, restrict this dissertation's focus. My emphasis will therefore solely be on white men and non-white women as the most active, open, and numerous participants in the antebellum period's interracial dramas—and those most threatening to the existing social order.

Finally, this project seeks to probe the reasons behind this blatant contradiction between antebellum American policy and reality—or, to put it plainly, the disconnect between what was professed in parlors but revealed in bedrooms. Why did so many white men in this period either directly or indirectly participate in interracial sex? How could they reconcile these dalliances with their professed racial ideology? Why did society itself, which so loudly despised miscegenation, turn a blind eye to it—or even tacitly encourage it? William Henry Harper, for example, stated in his 1852 *Proslavery Argument* that the "purity" of white southern women "is caused by, and is a compensation for, the evils resulting from the existence of an enslaved class of more relaxed morals."[15] How was this statement, which essentially made miscegenation between the so-called "men of the superior caste" and their slaves of "easy chastity" a *requirement* for the maintenance of white female purity, so widely accepted in southern society? This dissertation posits three main reasons for the contradiction: first, a gendered understanding of miscegenation; second, a complex racial hierarchy that involved a kind of color spectrum, granting women of certain races—or certain racial mixes—some amount of social status; third, an ideological impasse between the perceptions of ideal, white masculinity and femininity, which I term a "crisis of femininity."

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[14] For example, George Chauncey's book, *Gay New York,* analyzes the prevalence of homosexual activity in turn-of-the-century New York, especially within the "sporting culture." Peter Boag's work, *Re-Dressing America's Frontier Past,* analyzes the fluid boundaries of gender and sex in the 19th and early 20th century West, where men and women of all races and ethnicities found various ways, such as cross-dressing, to redefine their own gender and sexual identities. George Chauncey, *Gay New York* (New York: Basic Books, 1995). Peter Boag, *Re-Dressing America's Frontier Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

[15] William Henry Harper, "Harper on Slavery," in *The Proslavery Argument, as Maintained by the Most Distinguished Writers of the Southern States,* eds William Harper, Thomas Roderick Dew, James Henry Hammond, and William Gilmore Simms (Charleston: Walker, Richards & Co., 1852), 41.

Gendering Miscegenation and Complicating the Racial Spectrum

One historiographical trend pioneered by feminist scholars has been the "gendering" of social, cultural, and political phenomena. In an article that shaped this approach, Joan Scott wrote that "gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power."[16] For example, Amy Greenberg's *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* examines the way American imperialism was often depicted by contemporaries as a power play between the virile, strong, "masculine" invader, the United States, and the desirable, weaker, "feminine" annexed lands.[17] I argue that miscegenation was also viewed by antebellum contemporaries as a gendered power relationship backed by pseudo-scientific thought. Chapter One will further detail how medical understandings of sperm and egg, the process of fertilization, and racial difference appeared to buttress the social ideas of "inferior" versus "superior" races, and "passive" femininity versus "strong" masculinity. To many contemporaries, miscegenation through the female line—that is, sex between a white male and a non-white female that produced mixed-race girls—could actually be ameliorative. In other words, the infusion of supposedly "white" characteristics through white "blood"—the term contemporaries used to refer to a genetic process they did not yet understand— could physically and even morally strengthen the mixed-race progeny.[18] On the other hand, miscegenation through the male line—sex between a white woman and non-white man, or any kind of sex that produced mixed-race male children—was seen as degenerative. The non-white blood of the male was seen to pollute the white, female vessel. The resulting children, then, would be tainted with the negative characteristics of the inferior race: physical and moral degeneracy.

I also argue that this notion of miscegenation as gendered led to a second justification in the minds of American white men: the blurred boundaries of the racial spectrum. Since antebellum scientific thought dictated that every race had certain, biologically-determined characteristics, whites imagined they could observe the phenotypical expressions of white and non-white blood. In his book *Soul By Soul,* Walter Johnson observes the way these notions translated into decisions made in the slave market. Mixed-race male slaves, for example, were thought to be particularly cunning and rebellious, an expression of the "white" characteristics of intelligence and love of liberty. Mixed-race female slaves, on the other hand, were believed to be more delicate, modest, and beautiful than fully black women, thus expressing the particular virtues of white femininity. "Hybrid whiteness was . . . imagined into meaning by the buyers," Johnson writes, "into delicacy and modesty, interiority and intelligence, beauty, bearing, and vulnerability. These descriptions of light-skinned slaves were projections of slaveholder's own dreamy interpretations of the meaningfulness of their skin color."[19]

The same preference for mixed-race over full-blooded black women was also exemplified in white men's relations with Indian and Spanish American women. Most contemporary reports such as travelogues or diaries were quick to mention the noble, Spanish

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[16] Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category for Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91 (December 1986): 1067.
[17] Greenberg, "American Men Abroad," in *Manifest Manhood,* 88-91.
[18] Chapter One will further detail antebellum beliefs on "blood-mixing" and the reproductive process. This dissertation will use the term "blood," without quotation marks, as a term commonly used in both the antebellum and modern periods to refer to genetic backgrounds and the hazy concept of racial lineage.
[19] Johnson, *Soul by Soul,* 155.

blood of a preferred Mexican *"señorita*," or the French father of an "Indian maiden."[20] Many of the poems, plays, novels or histories about Pocahontas proudly mentioned her distinguished line of descendants among some of "the most respectable families of the state of Virginia."[21] Whether first-hand accounts, histories, or fiction, almost all antebellum literary works featuring a non-white female protagonist repeatedly proclaimed her to be mixed-race, the resulting lightness of her complexion and virtues of her character plain to all.

Yet the perceived haziness and fluidity of the racial spectrum worked both ways. On the one hand, it could be used to prove the "whiteness" of a desired mixed-race woman: her light-complexioned beauty, gentleness, intelligence, delicacy, and modesty. These could give her enough of a respectable veneer to be socially accepted—or tolerated—as a white man's paramour. On the other hand, it could also be used to excuse the white man's sexual aggression and the woman's status as concubine rather than wife. Even when every other aspect of a woman appeared "white," any drop of non-white blood was thought to exhibit itself in her sexual nature. Chapter One will further detail the characteristics ascribed to non-white blood, locating their foundations in perceptions of social and cultural traditions, as well as antebellum medical thought. According to scientific tracts, travelogues, and literature, non-white blood translated into sensuality, volatile passions, sexual ardor, physical boldness, promiscuity, and certain affinities for masculine pursuits like horse-riding, smoking, hunting, and even fighting and cross-dressing. Interestingly, almost every mixed-race woman, whether part black, Indian, or Spanish American, was thought to possess these same traits. This homogeneity is perhaps most obvious in visual representations. Antebellum illustrations of mixed-race women of every variety are astonishingly similar. In keeping with the descriptions found in the associated literature, each illustration has the same "voluptuous" body, "lustrous" black eyes, magnificent mane of long, "raven" hair, plump, "ruby red" lips, and a "clear," "olive," "brunette" complexion brightened by warm, rosy cheeks.[22] These women, dazzlingly beautiful, alluringly sensual, ardently loving, thrillingly passionate, and, of course, marginally respectable and accepted in white society, fulfilled white male fantasies of the ideal concubine.

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[20] The words "*señorita*" and "Indian maiden" are in quotation marks to highlight their common use by antebellum travel and fiction writers to refer to romanticized non-white women. Future references will not be punctuated in this way unless referring to specific quotes.

[21] One example, quoted here, is Samuel Stanhope Smith's 1787 work, *An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species,* quoted in Tilton, *Pocahontas: the Evolution of an American Narrative*, 10.

[22] Each word in quotations represents descriptions that appear repetitively in antebellum poems, novels, newspapers, travelogues, dime novels, and other literary forms. They will be further analyzed and sourced in the succeeding chapters.

Figure 0.1: This illustration from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* shows the famous scene of the quadroon Eliza—a classic "tragic mulatta"—leaping across the ice floes of the Ohio River to save herself and her child from slave-catchers. Charles Bour, "Eliza's Flight," *ca.*1860, colored lithograph, Courtesy of the New York Historical Society, U.S.A/ The Bridgeman Art Library.

Figure 0.2: This was best-known representation of Pocahontas in the nineteenth century.[23] Thomas Sully, *Pocahontas*, 1852, oil on canvas, Courtesy of the Virginia Historical Society.

[23] William M. S. Rasmussen and Robert S. Tilton, *Pocahontas: Her Life and Legend* (Richmond: Virginia Historical Society, 1994), 39.

Figure 0.3: This image appeared in a special 1857 issue of *Hutchings California Magazine* titled "The World in California." The image itself was titled "Californios," and purported to depict native Californians of Mexican descent. The woman appears extremely white, virginal, and well-dressed, while her male companion seems rather effeminate in both his features, stance, and dress. Such depictions reflected contemporary, Anglo-American stereotypes. "Californios," *Hutchings California Magazine*, 1857, Courtesy of California State Library.

Such a fantasy is the third reason I posit for the contradiction of antebellum interracial sex, and the pivot upon which my overarching argument rests. I hold that a variety of social, cultural, and economic factors in the antebellum period intersected to create significant sexual and marital disadvantages for white women. I term the confrontation of these forces a "crisis of femininity." This, I believe, is the main reason white men increasingly sought out non-white women for sex or even marriage. I use the term "crisis" for two main reasons. Firstly, the word connotes a period of flux and upheaval culminating in a decisive change. This is useful for the construction of my final chapter, which will examine the ways white women themselves were involved in the crisis's resolution. The term also connotes danger, which is apt for the description of changes that actually threatened societal order. Secondly, the term echoes the historical notion of a nineteenth-century "crisis of masculinity," which scholars use to describe the changes in gender norms caused by the Industrial Revolution and the backlash against "soft," effeminate, middle-class culture.[24] I specifically chose to echo this recognizable concept because

[24] Many historians place this "crisis of manhood" in the late nineteenth century, after the Civil War, but others locate the stirrings of discontent and confusion within the antebellum period. See: Joe Dubbert, "Progressivism and the Masculinity Crisis," in *The American Man,* eds Elizabeth Pleck and Joseph Pleck (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall,1980); Michael Kimmel, "The Contemporary 'Crisis' of Masculinity in Historical Perspective," in *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies*, ed. Harry Brod (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987); Gail Bederman,

I believe it is far more useful to understand the way societal change catalyzed major transformations in both men *and* women. The onslaught of rapid change wrought by industrialization, immigration, the Second Great Awakening, universal male suffrage, the rise of the Cotton Kingdom, the print revolution, imperialism, the expansion of the frontier, and the pursuit of "manifest destiny" created shifts in gender norms that influenced and reinforced each other.[25] In other words, a "crisis of masculinity" resulting in the rise of a culture that historian Amy Greenberg terms "aggressive masculinity" was mutually reinforced by a "crisis of femininity" that I locate within the so-called "cult of domesticity."[26]

The "Crisis of Femininity"

Social forces compounded these gender crises and actually worked against white marriage. As America embarked on the period of industrialization, cities like New York became pockmarked with factories, shops, and boardinghouses that swelled with young, male workers fresh from surrounding rural areas. The problem, however, was that young, middle-class women were not generally expected or encouraged to leave their secure homes for the tumultuous urban environment. As Greenberg writes, "young unmarried men in America's cities faced dismal marriage prospects. Unmarried men outnumbered unmarried women by a substantial margin in most cities in the 1850s," and "the censuses of 1850 and 1860 noted a fall in the incidence of marriage in America."[27] Furthermore, the period's booming sex trade and rampant increase in brothels evidence the availability—and perhaps, to some, the preferability—of alternate options to marriage.[28] Even in the nation's rural areas, men generally outnumbered women because of the relatively high rate of childbirth mortality. As for the South, many regions (including the entire state of South Carolina) had significantly larger black populations than white; black women, therefore, often outnumbered white. In the West, finally, the dearth of white women is

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Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880—1917 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Elliot Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood.*

[25] An intimidating variety of historiography examines the effect of these various upheavals on American society. For the purposes of a small footnote, some of the key works include: Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978); Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815—1837* (New York: Hill and Wang,1978); Eugene Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974); Winthrop Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro, 1550-1812* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969); Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815--1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Richard Stott, *Workers in the Metropolis: Class, Ethnicity, and Youth in Antebellum New York City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); David Henkin, *City Reading: Written Words and Public Spaces in Antebellum New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Stuart Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760—1900* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Sean Wilenz, *Chants Democratic : New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1984); Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood*; Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny.*

[26] These terms, as well as the specific ways these "crises" manifested themselves in new gender roles and definitions, will be further detailed in Chapter One. Greenberg actually refers to the culture as one of "aggressive manhood," but I have chosen to use the word "masculinity" as a specific counterpoint to the types of "femininity" I later discuss.

[27] Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood*, 113.

[28] For details on the growing sex trade in New York City, see Timothy Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992).

legendary: the first pioneers, trappers, traders, and forty-niners were men, paving the way for their "civilizing" counterparts to follow. "It is hardly surprising," Greenberg writes in her examination of travelogues romanticizing the women of Spanish America and other historically "Latin" colonies, "that American travelers would look fondly on Latin American women under these circumstances." One clue, she believes, is that "American travel narratives were far more enthusiastic about the women of Latin America than were European narratives."[29] I argue that the same is true of white American men who "looked fondly" on female slaves, freedwomen, and Indian women.

Economic forces, too, worked against white marriage. Marriage was extremely expensive, not because weddings tended to be extravagant but because a married man was expected to establish and support his entire household. Since respectable white women (in other words, those who aspired to be termed "middle class") were not supposed to work, a man had to ensure that his job and income were lucrative and secure enough foundations to build a family upon. This predicament was widespread throughout America: men in rural areas had to ensure that their farms, plantations, or ranches were sufficiently large and successful, and men in towns and cities had to secure well-paid business or professional positions. Frederick Law Olmsted commented on this problem when he visited New Orleans and was shocked to find so many Americans with quadroon mistresses. The designation "quadroon," which will be further detailed in Chapter Two, was generally applied to any woman of mixed African and white blood. In New Orleans, many of these women made up a significant portion of the population of free blacks. In the old French system of *plaçage* in New Orleans, these women were essentially hand-picked by white men (in formally conducted business transactions with the *placées'* parents) as mistresses. Olmsted better understood the initially outrageous situation when the men who engaged in *plaçage* explained it to him. "One reason which leads this way of living to be frequently adopted by unmarried men," Olmsted wrote, "is that it is much cheaper than living at hotels and boarding-houses." After all, he continued, clearly assuming that his audience understood the obstacles to marriage, "no young man ordinarily dare think of marrying, until he has made a fortune to support the extravagant style of house-keeping, and gratify the expensive tastes of young women, as fashion is now educating them." Therefore, "many [men] are obliged to make up their minds never to marry." Olmsted described one young man who insisted that keeping a quadroon mistress was the cheapest way to live in New Orleans. This man hired two apartments at low rent and didn't require a servant, since the quadroon "did the marketing, and performed all the ordinary duties of house-keeping herself." In fact, Olmsted appeared convinced that this style of living was in many ways preferable to marriage with a white woman. After all, he mused, "a woman of high society is so useless, with no solid acquirements." How could mens' "passions [be] dormant while a pure domestic life is held to be so far in their future?"[30] Non-white mistresses could at least be defended as understandable, and perhaps even viewed as necessary.

Olmsted's reasoning could be—and was—just as easily applied to situations elsewhere in the United States. In the West, for example, many trappers, traders, and frontiersmen took Indian wives. Indian marriages solidified relations with Indian communities, which were essential components of trade that relied on Indian cooperation, protection, and labor. Edwin Denig at Fort Union in the Rocky Mountains, for example, wrote in 1848 that by marrying into prominent

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[29] Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood*, 113.

[30] Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States, With Remarks on Their Economy* (New York: Dix & Edwards, 1856), 598—600.

Indian families, men in charge of trading posts "increase their adherents, their patronage is expanded, and they make correspondingly larger profits. Their Indian relatives remain loyal and trade with no other company."[31] The fur companies therefore actively encouraged these unions, eager for the economic leverage they secured.[32] Similarly, many men who worked within Mexican territory made alliances with prominent Mexican families that greatly increased their economic, social, and political clout. As historian Albert Hurtado explains in his work on interracial relations in Mexican California, the secularization of mission lands after independence bestowed vast holdings on Mexican ranchero families. "This transfer of property created . . . an elite that was land and cattle rich but money poor. It also made the daughters [of these families] exceedingly attractive marriage partners" to European and American newcomers.[33] Unlike American women at the time, Mexican women were allowed to own property, and daughters inherited land and estates on an equal basis with sons.[34] Foreigners married to Mexican women were also granted Mexican citizenship, which lifted certain trade restrictions, opened a web of kin networks, and offered influential public offices.[35]

In many parts of the United States, it therefore made social and economic sense to have a non-white paramour or wife. These, however, could not be the only reasons non-white women often appeared to be more attractive partners than white women. Such justifications do not, for example, explain why so many wealthy, successful men participated in interracial alliances. Chapter Two, for example, will detail the significant participation of wealthy planters in a sex trade of mixed-race slave girls. The majority of men who engaged in this "fancy girl" trade were extremely prosperous and married to elite white women. They therefore gained no social or economic benefit from their concubines at all. Similarly, a number of men who conducted western trade among the Indians or in Mexican lands were also wealthy, successful businessmen with white families back East. Perhaps most importantly, however, the literature that romanticized these non-white women bestowed no social or economic advantage on readers at all: they were clearly indulging some other interest. Even the travelogues of tourists in the South, soldiers in Mexico, western migrants, or forty-niners focused far more on the beauty, sensuality, promiscuity, and availability of black, Indian, and Spanish American women than on their economic promise. And, most tellingly, an astonishing array of literature, travelogues, diaries and newspaper accounts compared white women to their "duskier sisters" and announced a preference for the latter. When a German duke visited New Orleans in 1825, for example, he remarked that, when he went to a subscription ball to which only whites of "good society" were admitted, most of the gentlemen "did not remain long at the ball, but hasted away to the quadroon ball" that was going on simultaneously. There, among ladies described by one American newspaper as "the most beautiful women in the world," the Duke explained that the white men "amused themselves more, and were more at ease."[36] Thus even when white women *were* available, even when men *were* financially and socially stable enough to marry them, and

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[31] "Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz," 156, quoted in Lansing, "Plains Indian Women," 420.
[32] Michael Lansing, "Plains Women," 417.
[33] Hurtado, *Intimate Frontiers*, 22, 23.
[34] Dysart, "Mexican Women in San Antonio," 371.
[35] Craver, *The Impact of Intimacy*, 1-27.
[36] Bernhard, Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, *Travels Through North America, During the Years 1825 and 1826*, (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Carey, 1828), 1: 58. Quote on "most beautiful women in the world" from Wilson Conworth, "Wilson Conworth, Number Nine," *The Knickerbocker*, February, 1838, 101.

even when relations with a non-white woman provided no obvious advantage, they were often preferred over white wives. What, then, explained this apparent perversion?

I argue that the aforementioned beliefs in gendered miscegenation and a fluid racial spectrum created, as earlier descried, white male fantasies of the ideal concubine. The reason such a woman was particularly attractive to white men was because, besides various economic and social factors, there was an underlying *cultural* dilemma structuring the crisis of femininity. The changes in both male and female gender norms created a vast divide in sexual definitions and expectations. Furthermore, I argue that the crisis affected all sectors of society. Historians generally agree that the middle class, which emerged in the nineteenth century amid the dislocations of industrialization and urbanization, formulated the period's gender norms. According to Peter Stearns, "it was middle-class values that, in many spheres of activity, came to influence the total society most completely." By virtue of its ability to attain higher education and to dominate the consumer culture, the nineteenth-century middle class "extend[ed] class values into redefinitions" of cultural forms like gender norms.[37] This meant that certain gender roles and expectations permeated all classes of society. For example, the "cult of domesticity," which will be further examined in ensuing paragraphs, was really only attainable for those classes who could afford to keep women at home. Yet the definitions and requirements of "true womanhood" that it established came to be seen not as class-specific, but natural to the sex. Though some working-class women shunned the expectations, others internalized its associations with respectability and strove to establish them to the best of their ability within their own households. Victorian writers "were adamant that respectability was not based on birth or wealth but could be learned by anyone who accepted the ideology of domesticity and exhibited appropriate genteel behavior."[38]

However, other Americans reacted against Victorian gender codes, questioning their definitions and deliberately rebelling against their expectations. If most historians agree that the "cult of domesticity" began to establish a standard definition of femininity, many argue that antebellum definitions of masculinity were still in flux.[39] Amy Greenberg, for example, posits that a Victorian code of respectable, "restrained masculinity" was challenged by an adherence to a kind of "martial" or "aggressive masculinity."[40] Such a division, furthermore, was not simply along class lines. Though "aggressive masculinity" was particularly established among the

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[37] Peter N. Stearns, "The Middle Class: Toward a Precise Definition," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 21, no. 3 (July 1979): 395. For other works on the creation of the nineteenth-century middle class, see Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830—1870* (New Haven: Yale University, 1982); Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790—1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1981); Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class*; Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*.

[38] Robert Fitts, "The Rhetoric of Reform: The Five Points Missions and the Cult of Domesticity," *Historical Archaeology* 35, no. 3 (2001): 116.

[39] A few works within the comprehensive historiography examining multiple forms and practices of masculinity in the mid-nineteenth century include: Mark Carnes and Clyde Griffen, eds, *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990)*;* Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); Amy Greenberg *Cause for Alarm: the Volunteer Fire Department in the Nineteenth-Century City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,1998); Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood;* Brian Roberts *American Alchemy: The California Gold Rush and Middle-Class Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Susan Johnson, *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000); Wilenz, *Chants Democratic.*

[40] Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood,* 9-11.

working classes as a direct reaction to middle-class expectations, it permeated all classes of society, in all parts of the country.

Many northern men felt displaced by the anonymity of urban living, the industrial revolution's replacement of artisanal labor with machine work, and the hypocrisy and sentimentality they perceived in Victorian middle class culture. These men often adopted what historians have termed a culture of "aggressive masculinity" or a "sporting culture," indulging in a fast-paced, often licentious urban lifestyle characterized by brothels, fighting-pits, and saloons.[41] Though often organized by working-class men and proliferating in poorer neighborhoods, middle and upper class men often indulged in these pursuits by going "slumming" in the seedier parts of town.[42] In the South, the economic changes wrought by the cotton boom and resulting entrenchment of slavery encouraged a similar masculine culture. There, a culture of "honor" mandated a kind of belligerent, courageous, energetic masculinity that would buttress and protect a world of women, children, and slave dependents. Young, elite planters were taught that virility, strength, and passion were necessary for an effective master and patriarch. Gambling, dueling, drinking, and pursuing sexual adventures with slaves were considered part and parcel of a young master's education.[43] This culture of honor was to some extent even adopted by yeomen farmers who did not own slaves: they were, as historian Stephanie McCurry has described, "Masters of Small Worlds" in which familial dependents replaced slaves in the patriarchal hierarchy.[44] As for the West, many northern and southern men saw the frontier as the font of a rugged, raw kind of masculinity. Those who chose to venture out as trappers, traders, soldiers, explorers and gold-hunters were all encouraged to cultivate a rough-and-ready "frontier spirit." Men like Kit Carson, Davy Crockett, and, later, Wild Bill Hickock, became folk heroes, renowned for their ability at cards, their stomach for whiskey, their prowess on a horse, their skill with guns, and their adventures among rabid Indian warriors and adoring Indian maidens.[45] These various men had been indoctrinated with the belief, part cultural and

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[41] Numerous historians have examined the "sporting culture" that sprang up among young, displaced men in urban areas. A few include: Wilenz, *Chants Democratic*; Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*; Patricia Cohen, Timothy Gilfoyle, and Helen Horowitz, *The Flash Press: Sporting Male Weeklies in 1840s New York* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Amy Gilman Srebnick, *The Mysterious Death of Mary Rogers: Sex and Culture in 19th Century New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[42] For more on "slumming," or the habit of certain middle and upper-class men of spending nights in the poorer neighborhoods enjoying the brothels, saloons, and fighting pits, see: Tyler Anbinder, *Five Points : the 19th Century New York City Neighborhood That Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections, and Became the World's Most Notorious Slum* (New York: Free Press, 2001); Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*; Robert Dowling, *Slumming in New York : From the Waterfront to Mythic Harlem* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Seth Koven, *Slumming : Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). As these books show, these pursuits were more numerous in working-class neighborhoods, but certainly not limited to them. Even the more respectable parts of many American cities boasted expensive brothels and saloons.

[43] The key source on antebellum southern masculinity and the culture of "honor" is Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983). See also Steven Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Kenneth Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Death, Humanitarianism, Slave Rebellions, The Pro Slavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[44] Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds : Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1995).

[45] A few key works on antebellum western masculinity, the "frontier spirit," and western folk heroes include: Leonard Richards, *The California Gold Rush and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007);

part scientific, that men were more passionate and sexual than women, and that sexual adventures were necessary for the honing of one's manliness.

Antebellum women were affected by the same social and economic forces, but in an entirely different way. As the public sphere in the North began to move from town and village greens to urban centers, women were increasingly confined to the private, domestic sphere. The world of industry and politics was increasingly portrayed as a dangerous whirlwind, a shark-fest of competing interests. As factory work, offices, political fraternities and town halls drew more and more men away from the home, the domestic realm became women's domain. For a woman of any class to earn the epithet "respectable," she was expected to care for her family, manage her household, and ensure that home became an idyllic "haven" where her bread-winning menfolk could rest like tired ships after the storm of the public sphere.[46] Such a philosophy was perhaps even more entrenched in the South, where the prevailing culture has been described as "fantatical" in its idolatry of southern women.[47] Historians have explained this exaggeration of the so-called feminine qualities of delicacy, innocence, dependency and purity as a consequence of, as William Henry Harper wrote, the presence of an "enslaved class of more relaxed morals."[48] Slavery thus "whitened" white women, enabling them to cultivate more refined, domestic virtues and accomplishments as slaves took over fieldwork and household chores. As for yeomen women whom necessity often placed in the fields, the presence of even one, hired slave was viewed as a rung up the social ladder.[49] In the West, by contrast, servants and slaves were extremely rare. Women on the frontier were unable to enjoy the refinements available to their northern and southern sisters, but they proclaimed their "civilizing influence" with a proud vengeance. Though their floors were often packed dirt, their parlors replaced by grimy cook-stoves, and their vanity tables replaced by tin buckets of cold water, frontierswomen insisted on domesticating the "Wild West."[50] Eliza Farnham, for example, organized the California Association of American Women in 1848 with the express purpose of "civilizing" that territory by filling it with women. In her broadside advertising the venture, she insisted that "the presence of women," with all their "kindly cares and powers," would be "one of the surest checks on many of the evils" in California.[51]

Historians have termed this ideology in all its regional manifestations the "cult of domesticity." One of the main reasons women were thought to be ideally suited for this domestic world was because they were believed to be naturally more virtuous than men. Just as cultural and scientific beliefs intersected to construct an image of inherent male passion, the same forces

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Johnson, *Roaring Camp*; West, *The Contested Plains*; David Murdoch, *The American West: The Invention of a Myth* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2001); Matthew Basso, Laura McCall, and Dee Garceau, eds, *Across the Great Divide: Cultures of Manhood in the American West* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

[46] For the "cult of domesticity" in the North, see Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*; Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780—1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New Haven: Yale University Press,1973); A more detailed analysis of the historiography will appear in Chapters One and Eight.

[47] For the description "fanatical," see Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 15.

[48] Harper, *The Proslavery Argument,* 41.

[49] Johnson, *Soul by Soul,* 90, 93.

[50] Chapter Eight will include a more thorough analysis of this phenomenon, and a detailed engagement with the historiography.

[51] Eliza Farnham, "Association of American Women" broadside, quoted in Riley, *Building and Breaking Families in the American West,* 12.

fashioned an ideal of innate female purity. Historian Barbara Welter famously identified this ideology as the "cult of true womanhood," arguing that the phrase was used by nineteenth-century writers addressing the subject of women "as frequently as writers on religion mentioned God." The attributes of "True Womanhood," Welter explained, were the means by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband and the rest of society. The four cardinal virtues, she explained, were piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.[52] Purity was the fulcrum on which the other traits balanced: a chaste woman evidenced her virginal piety, her sexual submission to none but her husband, and her sole commitment to domestic relationships. Such a virtue, moreover, was seen as being natural to women. "The accepted belief," historian Anne Firor Scott writes, "was that only men and depraved women were sexual creatures, and that pure women were incapable of erotic feeling."[53] Indeed, in his examination of divorce in Victorian America, Robert Griswold provides numerous examples of successful cases featuring women who attempted to divorce their husbands for being too sexually demanding. The opposite, cases in which men attempted to divorce their wives for "passionlessness," was usually unsuccessful. Griswold writes that "this emphasis on passionlessness had become the reigning orthodoxy by 1850."[54] Such a belief was not simply the result of white men's attempt to protect the legitimacy of their own offspring, or to reserve the women of their own race for themselves. Feminist historian Nancy Cott holds that "the belief that women lacked carnal motivation was the cornerstone of the argument for women's moral superiority, used to enhance women's status and widen their opportunities in the nineteenth century."[55] Whatever the fundamental reason behind this claim of female purity hinging on total asexuality, it was almost universally accepted.

Antebellum American society therefore created a massive ideological rift between the ideals of masculinity and femininity that, I argue, resulted in a very real, physical rift between white men and women. If white society necessitated such a yawning divide between a rampant male libido and a feeble female sex drive, where could the excess sexual energy go? If white men were encouraged to have multiple sexual adventures to polish their masculinity but expected white women to enter their marriage beds as breathless virgins, how could they account for such drastically different sexual repertoires? American society provided the solution in the form of non-white, preferably mixed-blood women: beautiful and erotic enough to tempt white men, they were nonetheless degraded enough to use carelessly and cast off at the least inconvenience. Furthermore, the affairs did not carry the same guilt as those with white prostitutes, since the degradation of non-white women was present in their very blood, not in tragic pasts of seduction or rape.[56]

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[52] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Summer, 1966): 152.

[53] Scott, Anne Firor, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p 54.

[54] Robert L. Griswold, "Law, Sex, Cruelty, and Divorce in Victorian America, 1840-1900," *American Quarterly* 38, no. 5 (Winter, 1986): 752.

[55] Nancy F. Cott, "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850," *Signs* 4, No. 2 (Winter, 1978): 233.

[56] White prostitutes created a dilemma in Victorian minds, since they seemed to contradict white women's "natural" passionlessness. Their "fall" was often explained as the result of tragic rape or seduction. See Srebnick, *The Mysterious Death of Mary Rogers,* especially Chapter Three, "The Beautiful Segar Girl: Mary in the City of the New World."

The real threat at the core of this "crisis of femininity," of course, was the possibility that these colored concubines would supplant white wives in their husbands' affections. This dissertation argues that such a danger was actually very real. Southern divorce cases detailed scandalous stories of men inviting their black mistresses to slip into bed between themselves and their wives, or of white women being forced to wait on slave concubines enthroned in their chairs and dressed in their clothes. Western records condemned men who lured white wives to the frontier only to force them to labor alongside their multiple Indian "squaws." Newspaper articles gossiped about soldiers who returned to their old northern sweethearts only to introduce them to their new, scintillating Mexican wives. Travelogues and diaries bluntly proclaimed the charms, looks, and elegance of Indian, Mexican, and black women superior to those of white women. And dime novels, short stories, and even high literature repeatedly presented dual heroines, one dark and passionate, the other light and insipid, and steered the reader's preference decidedly toward the former. Clearly, in being raised to the rarified heights of the social pedestal, antebellum white femininity was practically pushed out of the physical realm and replaced by sexual fantasies of race.

A Note on Structure and Sources

My chapters will be organized according to both the structure of my argument and the nature of my sources. Chapter One will delve more thoroughly into the concepts of the "crisis of femininity," the gendered nature of miscegenation, and the fluidity of the racial spectrum by engaging further with the historiography on antebellum concepts of race and gender. It will examine numerous primary sources, from advice manuals to etiquette books, letters, diaries, and medical tracts, in order to illuminate the cultural descriptions and scientific justifications behind the concepts of virile white masculinity, passionless white femininity, and hypersexual non-white femininity. It will also suggest that the "crisis of femininity" was actually apparent to a number of observers, from the feminist Eliza Farnham to the French political theorist Alexis de Tocqueville. These writers wrote quite bluntly on the matter, suggesting their own reasons and solutions for it.

Chapters Two through Seven will be organized according to the race of the women they focus upon. In an attempt to organize these analyses chronologically and geographically, Chapters Two and Three begin with black women, Chapters Four and Five move on to Indian women, and Chapters Six and Seven end with Spanish American women. In this way, the analysis moves from the South to the Southwest and follows the expansion of slavery, Indian Removal, western migration, the Mexican-American War, and the Gold Rush. As my analysis focuses solely on the types of non-white women with whom white men contracted open relations such as marriage or concubinage, Chapters Two and Three will be limited to a particular category of black women: the mixed-race slaves and freedwomen who were expressly purchased or contracted for extended, semi-official sexual relations. My intention is not to negate the experiences of other black women who were raped or otherwise sexually exploited by white men, but rather to focus on the small, very specific category with whom white men sought liaisons that mirrored their official relations with white women. Such unions with Indian and Spanish American women, even extending to marriage, were more common. For this reason, and because they deal with far greater geographic areas and significantly more numerous groups of

women, the chapters on Indian and Spanish American women will be longer than those on black women.

In order to highlight my emphasis on certain racial, social, and cultural perceptions that whites (by which I mean Anglo-Americans and a few Western Europeans) had of these varying non-white peoples rather than historical reality, I will also consistently use quotation marks to highlight certain terms. Stereotypical descriptions used by my historical subjects, such as "savage," "wilderness," and "civilized," will generally appear in quotation marks. Historical and literary terms and phrases such as "cult of femininity," "tragic mulatta," and "culture of aggressive masculinity" will also be presented in this way, so as to present them as intriguing theories and analytical strategies rather than historical facts.

In order to highlight the juxtaposition of reality and myth, the two chapters focusing on each group of women are thematically paired. The first of each pair will probe the "reality" of miscegenation: travelogues, diaries, letters, court cases, newspaper articles, and marriage statistics will illuminate the ways contemporary white men described, engaged in, and justified their interracial affairs. Such an analysis will present the scope of antebellum miscegenation as well as the existence and influence of the gender and race ideologies discussed in Chapter One.

The second of the paired chapters will present the contemporary fiction that focused on miscegenation with the women of each race. Generally, the works fall into categories that I label "tragic mulatta" literature (concerning mixed-race black women); "Pocahontas" or "frontier" literature (concerning Indian women); and "southwestern," or "Spanish American" literature (predominantly concerning Mexican women). I argue that such literature both influenced and was influenced by the actual instances of miscegenation that it bluntly described. My intention is not to conflate literature and reality, or to suggest that the popularity of the literature indicates the same pervasiveness of miscegenation in American society. Indeed, I argue that one of the main reasons such literature *did* enjoy such popularity was because it did *not* reflect reality: it enabled white men to participate in a fantasy of interracial sex that was safely within the confines of the romantic imagination. Nonetheless, the literature does evidence a comprehensive knowledge of the various types of interracial relations that existed in America. Moreover, personal accounts of white men who actively sought out interracial relations—whether tourists to New Orleans' quadroon balls, forty-niners nosing around Indian camps, or soldiers touring Mexico's cantinas and fandangos—repeatedly referenced romantic literary portrayals of non-white women.

I do not mean to suggest that this kind of "sensationalist" literature was dominant, read by the majority of men, or even a major influence on men's actions. It was certainly a major genre of American fiction, but there was no truly dominant style at this time. The majority of literature considered "respectable" and middle-class, in keeping with Victorian culture, was of the "sentimental" genre. This was characterized by moralizing works like Harriet Beecher-Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and domestic novels like Alcott's *Little Women*.[57] Sensationalist literature featuring non-white heroines and interracial sex was another feature of the culture of

[57] Professor Elisa Tamarkin, interview by author, U.C Berkeley English Literature Department, January 27, 2012. For works on sentimental literature in America, see: Herbert Ross Brown, *The Sentimental Novel in America* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1940); Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: the Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: the Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

"aggressive masculinity" that specifically reacted against Victorian norms. Nonetheless, thanks to its cheap production, it was very numerous and widespread, as well as extremely popular.[58] Furthermore, such prototypes of non-white heroines and investigations of interracial relations were not limited to the sentimental genre: they were prevalent in a wide variety of works. My examples will therefore include the writings of such literary greats as Sir Walter Scott, James Fenimore Cooper, Herman Melville, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Lydia Maria Child, as well the sensationalism of the forgotten, like Ned Buntline, Charles Averill, James Holt Ingraham, Harry Halyard, and John Davis. The issues raised in literature about slavery, the West, and Spanish America were addressed in a variety of ways. Some, like abolitionist tracts, were serious, politically and morally motivated. Others seem to simply have titillated readers' curiosity about exotic peoples and places. This dissertation will examine both types in an attempt to locate recurring patterns in the general body of American fiction.[59]

Another genre of extremely popular antebellum literature was the travelogue. These works straddled the divide between reality and fantasy, fact and fiction, but are significant to my analysis primarily *because* so many readers consumed them gullibly. The popularity of these narratives of exploration—on the high seas, in the West, through the South, or in Spanish America—is clear from their prevalence in antebellum library catalogs, the constant appearance of excerpts and reviews in almost every major periodical, and the publication of foreign works in American editions. Historian William Lenz argues that they "functioned as transitional works in an era still suspicious of fiction but hungry for wonders."[60] And, indeed, wonders seemed to abound in the antebellum period, especially. The expansion of slavery, mass immigration, American imperialism, western migration, and America's emergence as an industrial power with increasingly clear designs on the western hemisphere meant that significant numbers of white Americans were coming into contact with peoples of different races and cultures more than ever before. Is it any wonder, then, that the overwhelmingly male-authored travelogues spent considerable amounts of time describing—and most often admiring—the looks, language, dress, and folk practices of the women in every exotic new place? In many accounts, non-white women seem on par with mermaids, sirens, fairies and sphinxes: beautiful, mysterious, dangerous, and altogether far more exciting than the known elements of the female sex present America's villages, towns, and cities.

My final chapter and conclusion are also presented as a thematically linked pair, focusing primarily on the latter half of the nineteenth century—a period I label a "backlash" to the "crisis of femininity." These chapters seek to resolve the contradiction my dissertation appears to present: if such a crisis really did exist for white femininity, exacerbated by a simultaneous crisis

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[58] For more on sensationalist literature (which will be further defined in the succeeding section) and its popularity and place in American society, see: Cohen et al., *The Flash Press*; Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas;* Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (London: Verso, 1987).

[59] I echo Michael Denning's caveat from his comprehensive analysis of nineteenth-century American dime novels, substituting my own type of research—covering a broader expanse of genres—for his own focus on dime novels. "Though I will look at only a small fraction of the tens of thousands of [books] published in these years I hope to demonstrate that the formulas and figures that recur . . . hold a central place in [this genre] generally." Denning, *Mechanic Accents,* 5.

[60] William E. Lenz, "Narratives of Exploration, Sea Fiction, Mariners' Chronicles, and the Rise of American Nationalism: 'To Cast Anchor on that Point Where All Meridians Terminate,'" *American Studies* 32, no. 2 (Fall, 1991): 41—45.

in the formation of American masculinity, why is the period instead remembered for its increasingly institutionalized racism, growing belief in a scientific rationale behind white supremacy, and adamant social, legal, and political policies against miscegenation? I argue that these phenomena only really began to characterize the century in its later years, spurred by reform movements, increased western migration, the Civil War, and the rise of Jim Crow. I will argue that some of the main instigators of these changes were women, who reacted to the "crisis of femininity" in a variety of direct and indirect ways. As Victorianism increasingly became the hegemonic culture, as the southern plantation aristocracy fell from power, as women began to fill western towns and cities and create the institutions of "respectable society," and as anti-miscegenation laws began to proliferate in the majority of states, the crisis became less immediate. Miscegenation persisted, but white women established themselves as an effective police force. Chapter Eight therefore suggests that American women co-opted the "crisis of femininity" for their own purposes. By campaigning against it in the name of civilizational reform, they—intentionally or indirectly—turned the tables, using the implications of the threat to actually strengthen their own social and cultural power, and to buttress the ideology of white supremacy.

My conclusion, finally, examines whether these public actions reflected private thought: in other words, whether literature itself began to reflect the changing ideas about race and gender, and whether interracial fantasies disappeared or were simply transformed. The analysis, I hold, is relevant even today, in a society and pop culture that still possess a complicated, tenuous relationship with the issue of interracial sex that is rooted deep within the practices, stereotypes, and fantasies of almost 200 years ago.

Reader Responses: Applying Literary Theory to Historical Analysis

A dissertation so focused on both historical and literary sources must present dual contexts and analyses. A brief section on the historical context of the antebellum literary world, as well as the application of literary theory to historical subjects, is therefore necessary. Exactly how large was the American reading population in the antebellum period, and what were they reading? More specifically, what *meaning* did authors and readers give to their books? Can historical actions—what actual people did in reality—be linked to literary content—the fantasies that played out in a reader's imagination?

One of the reasons a particular focus on antebellum publications is so central to my argument is that the period witnessed a print revolution. Innovations in print technology included the invention of stereotyping and electrotyping, Napier's cylinder press, Hoe's ten-cylinder press, and Fourdrinier's paper-making machine. Suddenly, the numbers and circulation of newspapers shot up, so that in 1850 more than 2,500 newspapers were being published in the United States—more than any other nation in the world. Not only could books, newspapers, and pamphlets now be made so cheaply and in such mass quantities that almost anyone could afford them, but the nation's new transportation and communication networks also sped them to the very corners of America's hinterlands.[61]

It was, moreover, an "age of universal authorship" as well as an "age of book-making."[62] One didn't have to be a great scholar or even a great writer to publish cheap stories in

[61] Streeby, *American Sensations,* 11-29.
[62] Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas,* 176.

newspapers and magazines. The kind of literature that was cheap, mass-produced, and scorned by many respectable writers as "trash" was called "sensationalist literature." These dime-novels, serials, and pamphlets had atrociously complex yet formulaic plots, exotic, dangerous settings, white male heroes who practically oozed manliness, evil villains with rapacious appetites for murder and rape, and beautiful heroines with luxurious curls, heaving bosoms, and dresses apt to accidentally slide off their shoulders.

In *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers,* Nina Baym argues that, contrary to the "essential premise on which our history of the American novel is based," America in the 1840s and 50s was "a nation of novel readers." Certainly, some moralists and church organizations worried that novels were corrupting youth's imaginations, but her analysis shows that the vast majority of periodicals and reviewers praised fiction. Indeed, she claims, by the 1850s the novel had been accepted as "*the* literary art form of the nineteenth century." Everyone read them, "from the most cultivated leisured classes on down." Novels were available in periodicals (which also exploded in number at this time), in cheap pamphlets, in fancy bound editions, and in libraries. The nation, contemporary reviewers claimed, was being inundated with novels: "floods" of them, according to the *New York Review*; like "the locusts in Egypt," remarked the *Ladies Repository*; and "thick as autumn leaves all over country," agreed the *American Review*.[63]

Any major current event could trigger the "deluge."[64] Slavery, for example, was a hugely favorite topic as the issue became increasingly heated, twisted to the purposes of southern apologists and northern abolitionists alike. In *To The Halls of the Montezumas*, Robert Johannsen analyses the astonishing array of literature that surrounded the Mexican-American War, created by and for the soldiers themselves. Johannsen holds that "reading among Americans had never been so popular or so widespread. The expansion of public education, one of the highest literacy rates in the world, and an increase in leisure time brought on by industrialization created a growing demand for reading material." [65] Even foreign visitors commented in amazement on America's voracious literary appetite and bewildering numbers of newspapers. The soldiers' literary passion was apparent in their diaries and the letters they sent home. They quoted books and newspapers, requested them to be sent in the mail, and admitted to carrying them on campaign in knapsacks and searching for them among Mexican booksellers.[66] As my own primary source analysis will show, other western travelers—migrants, explorers, trappers, traders, and forty-niners—possessed a similar kind of literary appetite, usually for stories glorifying the frontier and the adventurous lives of those who braved it. Almost all of the literature on slavery, the West, or Spanish America involved interracial affairs, often at the very center of the plot.

Of course, most readers never ventured anywhere, choosing instead to read about such exciting exploits in the privacy of their own homes. The expansion of literacy at this time meant that women must also have been reading these kinds of stories. After all, much of the cheaper literature was widely available in a number of periodicals, bookstores, and libraries, and interracial plots entered even into the period's most vaunted, "high" literature. Partly because of

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[63] Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 14, 17—18, 44, 47, 50. Periodicals quoted Ibid., 26—27.

[64] "Deluge" quoted from the *Christian Examiner*, March 1845, referencing the "deluge" of novels that have "poured upon us from all lands." Quoted in Ibid., 27.

[65] Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas,* 175.

[66] Ibid., 149, 175—175.

the dearth of non-white authors at this time, a non-white literary public must also have consumed these works. Nonetheless, it appears that white men were the primary, intended audience. Periodicals specifically aimed at men were far more likely to print sensationalist stories, while ladies' magazines most often presented domestic or sentimental fiction.[67] The significant number of stories that were turned into plays also tended to cater to a male audience, since, prior to the 1850s, theaters were primarily male domains that respectable, middle-class women avoided.[68] Even books with a political bent, like abolitionist works, can be interpreted as having (to a certain extent) a targeted male audience: after all, it was men who had the voting power over the "peculiar institution." Library records also point to a gender division in reading patterns between sensationalist and travel literature (primarily male), and sentimental or domestic fiction (primarily female). Though both men and women read all genres, gendered preferences are obvious.[69] Shelley Streeby argues in her analysis of nineteenth-century sensationalist literature that this was due to the period's "ideologies of separate, gendered spheres" and the belief in "essential gender differences," which "exerted pressures on definitions of popular body genres." Sentimentality, she explains, was "increasingly being identified with middle-class women and with feminization in the mid–nineteenth century, even as sensationalism was more often associated with a masculine . . . resistance to sentimentality."[70]

Perhaps most obviously, however, the characters and the plots of the vast majority of literature concerning interracial love affairs were explicitly geared toward male consumption. The authors were overwhelmingly male; the stories themselves almost always concerned an admirable, manly, white hero; the love story usually focused on a similarly admirable, beautiful, feminine, non-white woman, as well as an occasional white, female rival; the general plot was usually adventurous, aggressive, exciting, and passionate (all "male" traits); and the language was often explicitly sexual. Nonetheless, as literary scholars have long debated, a reader's real engagement with the text is hard to determine. To what extent do a reader's literary choices reflect his or her own thoughts or actions, and to what extent do these choices influence them? As one scholar put it, "does the text manipulate the reader, or does the reader manipulate the text to produce the meaning that suits [his or her] own interests?"[71] Furthermore, to what extent can

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[67] I make this claim based on my own research. The vast majority of fiction analyzed in this dissertation appeared in male-oriented periodicals like the *Knickerbocker* rather than female-targeted papers like *Godey's Lady's Book.*

[68] Richard Butsch's article emphasizes the fact that, prior to the 1850s, "theater was a male club" that occasionally got so rowdy that middle and upper-class men also began to avoid it. Richard Butsch, "Bowery B'hoys and Matinee Ladies: The Re-Gendering of Nineteenth-Century American Theater Audiences," *American Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (September, 1994): 374-405.

[69] Ronald J. Zboray analyzes the records of the New York Society Library in his article "Reading Patterns in Antebellum America: Evidence in the Charge Records of the New York Society Library," *Libraries & Culture* 26, no. 2 (Spring, 1991): 301-333 . Although he claims that men and women were, in fact, reading the same kinds of books, he does note a discrepancy in the relative *popularity* of certain books to certain genders.

[70] Streeby, *American Sensations,* 32, 33.

[71] Patrocinio P. Schweickart, "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading," in *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts,* ed. Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocinio P. Schweickart (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1986), 48. As one theorist explains, all literature possesses "specific formal structures that will determine, in part, a given reader's response; likewise, every reader has a set of preconceived notions about aesthetics, culture, and gender that will determine how the formal structure of a text is read and comes to evoke particular kinds of meanings." I argue that, at least in the works I analyze, the authors had in mind what Peter Rabinowitz terms an "intended" or "authorial audience" whose engagement with the text they attempted to guide and manipulate. The author set the "formal structures" and assumed the reader's "preconceived notions." If the reader fell outside the scope of the "intended audience," of course, he or she may have found a totally different

the author's own intentions be fathomed? Do the ideas, desires, and actions represented by the characters reflect both the author and the reader's own, or can the latter sympathize with them without *sharing* them?

My dissertation argues that, in general, nineteenth-century authors very blatantly presented their own opinions on their own characters and plots. The "good" characters and "bad" characters were clearly demarcated, as was the course of a tragic or happy plot. In fact, many nineteenth-century authors interjected their own opinions or moral messages into their works, clearly directing the reader to a specific interpretation. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* for example, Stowe interrupts her own narrative of a slave family's escape to declare, in a narrative voice detached from any character, "Who can speak the blessedness of that first day of freedom? Is not the *sense* of liberty a higher and finer one than any of the five?"[72] Nineteenth-century authors also manipulated their readers' responses in more subtle, indirect ways, playing upon their own knowledge of their intended readers' beliefs and conventions. As Peter Rabinowitz argues in *Before Reading,* nineteenth-century authors expected their readers to comprehend the meaning behind skin, eye, and hair color. Since eyes were treated as the "windows to the soul" in nineteenth-century fiction, the reader was expected to recognize a character's moral persona through a description of his or her eyes. The fact that many non-white female characters possessed "flashing, dark eyes" was intended to connote passion and hyper-sexuality.[73] As will be seen in successive chapters, certain descriptive adjectives went together, creating patterns that linked the whole genre of interracial literature together: dark skin, eyes, and hair, for example, were linked with the adjectives "warm," "luxurious," "flashing," and "ripe;" white skin, fair hair, and blue eyes, on the other hand, were linked with the adjectives "frail," "sweet," "innocent," and "childlike." The connotations of such descriptions were meant to steer the reader's interest to particular characters. More often than not, the most admirable, sexual, and exciting descriptions were bestowed upon non-white female characters—even when the white, male hero himself chose the more insipid, frail white woman for his lover.

In this way, the reader's tastes were usually intended to be linked with the author's. "Happy" endings usually involved a connection between the interests of the author, reader, and white male hero, as the latter chose the "right" female lover and lived happily ever after. "Tragic" endings usually involved some kind of break among the three: either the white hero chose the "wrong" woman, or his choice of the "right" one nonetheless ended tragically. Of course, the simple preference of a non-white over a white woman in a story did not mean that either the author or reader entertained interracial fantasies in his own, personal life, or that he was more likely to suddenly seek them out. As literary scholars Marshall W. Alcorn and Mark Bracher argue in their application of psychoanalysis to literature, reading enables people to entertain, "at least provisionally, perspectives, values, and attitudes divergent from and even

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meaning than the author had intended. However, I also assume that audiences are to some extent self-selecting: the kinds of readers who chose to repetitively read this kind of literature would, most likely, have been the author's "intended audience." See: Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack, *Formalist Criticism and Reader Response Theory* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 156; Peter Rabinowitz, *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 20-21.

[72] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin: A Tale of Life Among the Lowly,* (Boston: John P. Jewett & Company, 1852), 2: 239.

[73] Rabinowitz, *Before Reading*, 87—88.

contrary to their own."[74] In literature where authorial intentions are clear, the reader can be "occupied" by the thoughts of the author: he can be steered, so to speak, to agree with the desires or actions of certain characters even though these may be directly contrary to his own.[75] By delineating a particular "enemy" and pointing out the means to a "happy" ending—in other words, by creating a common antagonist and a common goal—the author can establish a so-called "narcissistic alliance" between the reader and a character.[76] In this way, a middle-class, married, conservative, racist male reader could still desire a happy ending to the love story between a young, adventurous frontiersman and his beautiful, noble Indian princess. Such an "alliance" does not mean this reader would then divorce his wife, race out West, and eagerly seek out Indian tribes.

Nonetheless, literary theorists also argue that literature can indeed "alter a person's inner world, that representation of reality interposed between perception and action."[77] Stories can dramatize a reader's feelings or perceptions of which he or she may have been entirely unaware. "An encounter of this sort," Alcorn and Bracher argue, "allows the reader to grasp his or her own desires more clearly and pursue them more effectively through the diverse and often treacherous terrain of reality."[78] My dissertation argues that the popularity of interracial themes, and the strange way they played out—most often establishing a clear preference for non-white over white female characters—presents clear evidence of latent, perhaps unconscious desires present in the so-called "inner world" of American society, particularly among white American men. Furthermore, the fact that so many travelers, soldiers, adventurers, and migrants who ventured South or West explicitly referred to this kind of literature in their personal narratives seems to prove that some readers did indeed "grasp [their] desires" and "pursue them" across the more "treacherous terrain of reality."

Nineteenth-century readers and reviewers seemed to have been aware of the strange directions their desires took when reading certain books. "Every man recognizing in himself the elements of character delineated," a book reviewer in *Harpers* wrote, "sees himself openly revealed—his secret sympathies, impulses, ambitions—his vices, virtues, his temptations; and follows with terrible fascination the course of his undeveloped future—passes thoughtful and alarmed, and hangs back upon the very edge."[79] Rather than praise the kind of mutual understanding and sympathy such a "narcissistic alliance" could lend, the reviewer suggested that the revelation of such "secret" truths was frightening and problematic. Perhaps, then, this reviewer had in mind the plethora of literature that revealed to men certain, "secret" truths about their "terrible" and "alarming" fascination with non-white women, and the possibility of an as-yet-"undeveloped future" of interracial romance.

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[74] Marshall Alcorn and Mark Bracher, "Literature, Psychoanalysis, and the Re-Formation of the Self: a New Direction for Reader-Response Theory, *PMLA* 100, no. 3 (May, 1985): 344-349

[75] Wolfgang Iser argues that "if reading removes the subject-object division that constitutes all perception, it follows that the reader will be 'occupied' by the thoughts of the author, and these in their turn will cause the drawing of new 'boundaries.'" Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 298-299.

[76] Alcorn and Bracher, "Literature, Psychoanalysis, and the Re-Formation of the Self," 348-349.

[77] Ibid., 344.

[78] Ibid., 344.

[79] "Editor's Easy Chair," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine,* February, 1860, 410.

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"The Great Craving of My Nature"[1]
Race, Gender, and Sexual "Crisis" in Antebellum America

"An Education of This Kind is Not Without Danger:"[2]
Contemporary Views on the "Crisis of Femininity"

In 1831, the young Frenchman Alexis de Toqueville traveled all around America, scribbling notes on a society, political structure, and culture that bemused and fascinated him. In 1835, *Democracy in America* provided the world with the first detailed, insightful portrait of the "great experiment" in America….and a rather dismal view of American sexual relations.[3]

According to Tocqueville, Americans were much more orderly and chaste than Europeans. This, he hypothesized, was due to the rigid moral strictures they imposed on their women, their unromantic views on marriage, and the separation of men and women into almost totally separate spheres of work. "Although the travellers who have visited North America differ upon a great number of points, they all agree in remarking that morals are far more strict there than elsewhere," he wrote. "In America all books, novels not excepted, suppose women to be chaste." This was because society placed intense pressure on women to conform to certain moral standards. Americans, Tocqueville explained, "do not rely on religion alone to defend the virtue of woman; they seek to arm her reason also. . . they first [teach her] to exercise a proper control over [her]self." Tocqueville conceded that such gender expectations may have made society "more tranquil and better regulated," but he warned that "an education of this kind is not without danger," since it meant that, for men, "domestic life has often fewer charms." With his usual, astonishing talent for perception, Tocqueville noticed a gender crisis after a stay of less than two years.[4]

The problem with this "education," Tocqueville wrote, was that it tended "to invigorate the judgment at the expense of the imagination, and to make cold and virtuous women instead of affectionate wives and agreeable companions to man." Marriage, to both men and women, was therefore considered by Americans to be "a covenant which is often onerous, but every condition of which the parties are strictly bound to fulfill." Rather than bringing men and women closer together, marriage exacerbated the distance between the sexes. "In America the independence of women is irrevocably lost in the bonds of matrimony," Tocqueville stated. "[She] lives in the home of her husband as if it were a cloister." Such a metaphor connotes withering chastity as well as a "sacrifice of her pleasures to her duties." In Europe, he claimed, this was "seldom demanded of her." In the United States, "the inexorable opinion of the public," which

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[1] The title of this chapter is taken from a quote by South Carolina Senator James Henry Hammond, justifying his extra-marital affair with a slave by explaining that his white wife "could not fulfill the great craving of my nature." Hammond quoted in John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 96.

[2] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America: Part the Second, Social Influence of Democracy,* trans. Henry Reeve (1835; repr., New York: J.& H.G. Langley, 1840), 211

[3] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* trans. Henry Reeve (1835; repr., London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1875), 1: 23.

[4] Toqueville, *Democracy in America: Part the Second*, 211—222.

Tocqueville noted was set by the middle class, "carefully circumscribes women within the narrow circle of domestic interests and duties, and forbids her to step beyond it." Most likely describing the way such a system was defended to him, he wrote that "[it is] the best pledge and most certain sign of the purity of her morals; . . . [and] the highest security for the order and prosperity of the household." Nonetheless, Tocqueville went on to express his own opinions on the matter, explicitly noting the way it created a crisis of femininity:

> All these distinct and compulsory occupations are so many natural barriers, which, by keeping the two sexes asunder, render the solicitations of the one less frequent and less ardent—the resistance of the other more easy. . . . [T]here [are] at the same time a great number of courtezans and a great number of virtuous women.[5]

Perhaps most Americans were greatly offended by Tocqueville's summary of their gender roles and sexual relations. Others, however, vehemently agreed that a crisis existed, and admonished society for ignoring it. One of the most vociferous denouncers was the proto-feminist Eliza Farnham. She viewed the rising rates of prostitution and alarming proliferation of urban brothels as evidence of the abuse of society's sexual standards. Though, like Tocqueville, she did not actually use the term "crisis of femininity," her criticism of contemporary gender roles and the potential societal danger they presented almost exactly echoed Tocqueville's own. "The experiences of civilized homes too sadly testify that even their attractions are not always sufficient to withhold men," she wrote in her magnum opus *Woman and Her Era. "*Thousands of husbands and fathers who mean to maintain character, command respect and exercise a social power, participate freely in these horrors, which they call pleasures, of the sensual circle. . . . [T]hose loathsome, abhorrent relations which are the opprobrium of Civilization."[6]

Farnham, however, defined the crisis differently than Tocqueville. While the latter stated his distrust of the moral pedestal upon which American society placed its women, Farnham believed it necessary and natural. Tocqueville ascribed American men's waning interest in matrimony to the frigidity and separation engendered by this pedestal and the "cult of true womanhood" it inspired. Farnham, however, insisted that the trouble lay in the sexual double standard: if men, too, aspired to the moral heights they required of their women, evils such as prostitutes, concubines, and extra-marital affairs would evaporate. She located the problem not in the perceived "passionlessness" of American women, as Tocqueville did, but in the hyper-sexuality—and its tolerance by society—of American men.

"Man's first self-hood is the animal or lower nature [while] woman's first self-hood is the angelic or higher nature," she wrote. "Man is the degrader of the Love-relations; Woman their elevator." Furthermore, she declared that shocking numbers of men "revel . . . in bestial sensuality," but "if they suffer at all, in view of such conduct, they suffer but temporarily," since society exonerated them as soon as "they plead their appetites in extenuation of almost any vicious behavior in themselves." On the other hand, woman "is not characteristically sensuous as man is, but affectional . . . her intentions are pure, wise, and comprehensive." Farnham explained the "crisis of femininity" in explicit sexual terms when she wrote that "in men, in general, the sexual desire is inherent and spontaneous . . . . In the other sex, the desire is dormant, if not non-

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[5] Ibid., 211-222.
[6] Eliza Farnham, *Woman and Her Era* (New York: A. J. Davis, 1864), 2: 76.

existent."[7] Clearly, then, some Americans in the antebellum period were just as aware of the yawning sexual chasm as foreigners like Tocqueville were—and as their modern observers are today.

Yet Farnham's solution to this crisis is baffling to a modern reader. The fault, she explained, lay with men—not for possessing a naturally aggressively sex drive, but for failing to exert control over it. Farnham's feminist argument held that, were men to give women more rights and influence, the latter would be able to "soften," mould," and "refine" them. "A better day comes to Woman and also to Man," she predicted, "as she grows more influential over him, and he, by her withdrawal of his sensual standards, more conformed to the spiritual love which her nature yields, and desires in return." Farnham therefore placed the onus for such change upon women, since "the purity of Woman is the everlasting barrier against which the tides of man's sensual nature surge." It must therefore be "steadily beaten back, or human welfare decays in her failure."[8] Rather than relax their own moral standards, Farnham believed women must be even more vigilant in maintaining them. Indeed, she put her own words into action by campaigning against prostitution.[9] That horrific institution, she assured her readers, was caused solely by men, since she denied the possibility that women would pursue such liaisons of their own volition. The only reason for the existence of such degraded beings was the sexual appetite of the men who seduced, raped, or otherwise caused their downfall.[10] In Farnham's ideal America, society would most closely resemble the state of the angels, cultivating only a pure, spiritual love without a trace of sexual desire. One wonders how, exactly, she imagined the population would reproduce.

Yet many of Farnham's views were widely accepted in antebellum society. How could a "crisis of femininity" that was obvious to so many contemporaries have engendered such radically different views on its causes and solutions? How could Farnham's solution, which appears so idealistic and unreasonable today, have appeared such a desirable goal to antebellum society? And how, moreover, could Tocqueville, who had been in America for less than two years, come to a more insightful and realistic conclusion about the crisis than American citizens themselves? The answer lies in perspective. Tocqueville's foreign origins enabled him to see the crisis as a cultural phenomenon born of a vehemently religious, proudly self-policing, democratic society. Farnham, however, approached the issue from the perspective of one indoctrinated into certain religious and scientific beliefs. She was raised in a society that believed gender differences to be natural, inherent, and biological. To suggest change in American sexual natures would be akin to requesting stripes on a leopard. Men, with their "natural" lustiness, could not require their inherently passionless women to suddenly develop a sexual appetite, and women could only request *control* over manly sensuality. The virtual immutability of this belief system explains why the crisis existed for so long. American men and women were taught from childhood—in advice manuals, books, newspapers, medical tracts and a variety of other social media—that their respective genders had certain, natural qualities that resulted in different

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[7] Farnham, *Woman and her Era*, 2: 102, 76, 77, 118, 95, 285.
[8] Ibid., 138, 49, 95, 284-285.
[9] For more on Farnham's feminism and campaigns against prostitution, see Edward T. James and Janet Wilson, eds, *Notable American Women: a Biographical Dictionary* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1971), 598—600.
[10] Farnham assumed her readers held the same views of prostitution that she did. She wrote that "To most readers, it will doubtless seem labor wasted to add anything in proof of the assertion that women do not become prostitutes from sensuality in themselves." Farnham, *Woman and her Era*, 2: 285.

expectations, roles, and lifestyles. What was natural was good, these sources claimed, and what was American was best.

"Forgive almost any vice in a man who is manly; . . . If [he] will fight, . . . ride a dangerous horse over a rough country, . . . do [his] level best on whiskey, . . . [is] a devil of a fellow with women."[11]

The Culture of "Aggressive Masculinity"

The traditional, Victorian ideal of American masculinity in the antebellum period was one of impeccable self-discipline, rigidly controlled emotions, composed strength, and loving devotion to God and family. Amy Greenberg has termed this masculine type "restrained manhood" to contrast with her definition of "martial" or "aggressive manhood." While she acknowledges that not every man fell into one of those two camps, since there were a wide variety of gender practices at the time, she does argue that these two "visions of manhood" were dominant. In the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the two concepts "competed for hegemony:" one tended to be practiced more by members of the middle and upper classes, and members of the latter tended to be of the lower-middle or working classes. Nonetheless, a reason for their constant flux was the fluidity of the class boundaries that defined them, and members of all classes ascribed to both types.[12]

Yet by virtue of its primary association with the middle class, "restrained masculinity" had a tenacious hold on general social values, and a claim to the contested designation of "national culture." Scholars generally define "middle class" as specifically non-manual laborers: the white collar workers, artisans, petite bourgeoisie, and small capitalists who established "a lifestyle, set of cultural codes, behaviors, and conventions that helped to define an increasingly homogeneous civic order."[13] Historian Seth Koven eloquently describes the British Victorian middle class as "a paradoxical blend of arrogant self-confidence and anxious self-doubting," a characterization that just as aptly applied to the contemporary American equivalent.[14] Although those who ascribed to Victorian ideals claimed them morally superior and nationally dominant, they nonetheless felt constantly threatened by the presence of other competing (and often blatantly reactionary) cultures. The "domestic values" of thrift, sobriety, sexual restraint, emotional control, and financial success seemed constantly endangered by the hedonistic vices offered in urban areas, especially.[15] The middle class felt the true precariousness of its cultural mores when it viewed its young men carousing in slums, gambling halls, and saloons, and even its respectable elders slipping in and out of brothels.

The middle class therefore attempted to pre-emptively strike at the impending threats by publishing a variety of advice and etiquette manuals to young men, especially those who found themselves adrift in the tumultuous cities.[16] Etiquette manuals detailed exactly how to dress,

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[11] John William De Forest, *A Union Officer in the Reconstruction*, eds James H. Croushore and David Morris Potter (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 185.
[12] Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood*, 11, 12, 14.
[13] Melanie Archer and Judith Blau, "Class Formation in Nineteenth-Century America: The Case of the Middle Class**,"** *Annual Review of Sociology* 19 (1993): 17, 30.
[14] Koven, *Slumming*, 236.
[15] Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 127-141.
[16] For various examples of these advice manuals, as well as historical analyses, see: Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*; Rodney Hessinger, *Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn: Visions of Youth in Middle-Class America*,

where to have lunch, how to handle one's silverware, how to sit in polite company, and how to court pretty ladies. Total control was the key to pristine middle-class behavior, integral to setting oneself apart from what was commonly portrayed as a bellowing, drunken lower class and an indolent, ostentatious upper class. From 1830 to 1850, colorful male dress gave way to drab black and gray suits. Control of one's body required rigid posture, subdued gestures, and even prudent gazes. Most importantly, one had to control one's emotions: excessive anger, laughter, and volume was to be strictly avoided. In general, one had to maintain a kind of "parlor behavior"--a standard of comportment that would have made even the most genteel of ladies, sitting primly on plumped parlor cushions and sipping tea, completely at ease.[17]

Books like William Alcott's *The Young Man's Guide* gave specific instructions for men on how to bathe, dress, comport themselves, and act in front of women. Alcott waxed eloquent on the virtues of industry and temperance and the evils of indolence, drunkenness, gluttony and lust. He even addressed a component of the "crisis of femininity," anxiously advising men that "you ought to keep matrimony steadily in view. . . . Never consider yourself complete without this other half of yourself. It is too much the fashion among young men at the present day to make up their minds to dispense with marriage; an unnatural, and therefore an unwise plan."[18] Often, these kinds of advice manuals echoed the prim exhortations to women about passionlessness. One tract written by an anonymous author who simply chose to dub himself "A Gentleman" insisted that "the true method of getting along in society and in business, is to stave off all passionate and hostile feeling, whether of anger or scorn, and never let it enter your bosom, whatever may be the provocation."[19] William Thackeray's *Mr. Brown's Letters to a Young Man about Town*, written in England but published in America to popular reception, advised men to cultivate this kind of gentleness by basking in women's company as often as possible. "Run their errands" he coaxed, "send them flowers and elegant little tokens; show a willingness to be pleased by their attentions and to aid their charming schemes of shopping, or dancing, or this, or that. I say to you, make yourself a lady's man as much as ever you can." As for friends who may laugh at such dalliances, Thackeray encouraged young men to "[ignore] your club-swaggerers who are sucking the butts of billiard-cues all night [and] call female society insipid."[20]

The problem was, however, that a large contingent of men *did* scoff at the insipidness of female society, and reveled in the kind of "bestial sensuality" that Farnham had despaired of. Indeed, Farnham herself wrote that "average men" refuse to respect men who aspired to self-control and spiritual rather than sensual relations with women:

> They do not believe in the love which *lives* in the spirit, and only *expresses* itself through the senses . . . . To them, sensuality in some degree, is synonymous with manhood, and they are amused or contemptuous, at the idea of its lack, in any

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1780—1850 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Ronald G. Walters, ed., *Primers for Prudery: Sexual Advice to Victorian America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2000).

[17] Butsch, "Bowery B'hoys and Matinee Ladies," 375-385.

[18] William Andrus Alcott, *The Young Man's Guide* (Boston: 1846), 244-245.

[19] "A Gentleman," *Advice to a Young Gentleman on Entering Society* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1839), 135.

[20] William Makepeace Thackeray, *Mr. Brown's Letters to a Young Man About Town; with The Proser and Other Papers* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1853), 34, 41. For more on Thackeray's popularity and reception in America, see Richard Clark Tobias, "American Criticism of Thackeray, 1848-1855," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 8, no. 1 (Jun., 1953): 53-65.

> individual of their sex, to that degree which admits always of control by the higher faculties. No matter that he is strong, humane, affectionate, faithful, candid, honest, unselfish, constant; they praise him with bated breath, notwithstanding all these excellences, if this demand of the animal nature is not strong enough to overrule, in some moments of temptation, reason, conscience, honor or humanity, one or all; and they will show more sympathy with him who sets them aside in an adroit, not criminal way, than with him whose noble life and pure conduct steadily acknowledge their sovereignty.[21]

To Farnham's grief, "restrained manhood" was in no way the mainstream culture of masculinity at this time. Especially in urban areas, young men rebelled against what they considered a repressive, effete, and downright boring paragon of morality. Openly competing with Victorian mores was a whole underworld of commercialized sex and an astonishingly blunt, pseudo-political ideology one historian has labeled "libertine republicanism."[22] As previously mentioned, this culture was particularly cultivated among the working-classes. Nonetheless, as evidenced by such activities as "slumming," members from a variety of other classes who felt alienated by Victorian expectations found vindication in the "aggressive masculinity" that characterized libertine republicanism.

As historian Timothy Gilfoyle has evidenced in his exposé of New York City's "vice dens," sex became a major urban commercial industry in the mid-nineteenth century. Prostitution, masked balls, strip-teasing, "model artist shows" and pornography were readily available to an overwhelmingly male consumer world of entertainment, goods, newspapers and advertisements. Indeed, these affairs were shockingly public: prostitutes flaunted themselves in the infamous "third tier" of theaters, brashly held rooms in hotels, and advertised in guidebooks, newspapers, and personal cards. Willing women could be found in revolting waterfront "cribs," down dingy alleys, in gaudy brothels, or in tastefully furnished, expensive "parlor houses." Gilfoyle ascribes the proliferation of these options to a profound discontent with women's power in marriage. He explains that, thanks to the "cult of domesticity" and belief that women were naturally more virtuous than men, "the average American female enjoyed increasing power and autonomy within the family, especially over matters of sexuality and reproduction." Gilfoyle suggests that many men were "resentful" of the American middle class's ideal of "male sexual control and self-restraint within the family and . . . women as 'passionless.'" As a result, they "sought sexual power elsewhere."[23]

Should a man feel resentful of the so-called "petticoat government" which many felt women were imposing upon society, he could find a whole underground world to please his sexual appetites.[24] Not only did sexual commercial venues pockmark portions of most cities, but those who dabbled in this kind of male culture had their own literary media, networks of communication, and even political groups. Historians Timothy Gilfoyle, Helen Horowitz, and Patricia Cohen published the first comprehensive analysis of the period's so-called "Flash Press:" a collection of periodicals that aimed to entertain and enlighten men of the so-called "sporting culture" about leisure-time activities and erotic entertainments available in cities like

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[21] Farnham, *Woman and Her Era,* 2: 79, 80.
[22] The term "libertine republicanism" was coined in Cohen, et al., *The Flash Press,* 56.
[23] Gilfoyle, *City of Eros,* 18, 115.
[24] "Petticoat government" quoted in Ibid., 115.

New York. With such suggestive titles as the *Flash, Whip, Rake*, and *Libertine*, this press provided guides to the city's brothels, racy gossip columns, descriptions of the city's prostitutes, sensationalist stories, and pornographic pictures. They were, moreover, cheap, easily produced, plentiful and widely available. Such popularity and its resulting threat to Victorian mores was proved by a series of trials in 1843 that effectively shut the papers down. Nonetheless, the culture they publicized did not in any way subside. As Cohen, Gilfoyle, and Horowitz argue, the papers had succeeded in "normaliz[ing] those activities and thereby emboldened men to feel comfortable asserting male sexual prerogatives in opposition to the emerging canons of respectability." When perusing the Flash Press, the authors argue, "an underworld that formed a larger part of antebellum American culture than hitherto acknowledged" emerges, challenging what "has often been seen as a monolithic Victorian sexual regime."[25]

Moreover, the papers spread a pseudo-political ideology that had been taken up with a vengeance in various urban areas, particularly in working-class neighborhoods. "Libertine republicanism," the authors of the *Flash Press* history describe, "mixed an emotional critique of privilege and hierarchy with language more often associated with an expressive, promiscuous, male-centered sexuality." Its political implications were that it democratized male heterosexual gratification, making it available to anyone with the means. "Political liberation or republicanism was meaningless without sexual freedom. Sex in the flash press not only represented liberty, it made one a better republican."[26] Such an ideology fit snugly within a working-class, Democratic movement that was on the rise at this time. The proponents of this political-cultural ideology valorized male fraternity, aggression, virility and courage, and scorned anything effeminate or middle-class.

One well-known leader of this movement in New York was Mike Walsh. An immigrant from Ireland, Walsh proclaimed himself a spokesperson for a predominantly young, working-class political fraternity that alternately called itself the "Young Democrats," the "Spartans," or the "Subterraneans." He was also a champion of the so-called "b'hoy" culture. Young and mostly working-class, the b'hoys wore gaudy clothes, soaped and curled their hair, proclaimed their commitment to manly fraternity, joined all-male cohorts like volunteer fire companies and street gangs, and indulged in a raucous Bowery nightlife of oyster bars, saloons, fighting pits and brothels. It was the b'hoys who were the primary proponents of the so-called "sporting culture" in antebellum New York City. The universe of working men like the "b'hoys," one historian has explained, "revolved around not sober self-control, but treating companions to drinks and being treated in return; not saving for the future, but daredevil gambling; . . . not dogged industriousness, but revelry, conviviality, and good times; . . . not the sacred home-life of husband, wife, and children, but the raucous companionship and mutuality of male friends in male institutions."[27]

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[25] Cohen, et al., *The Flash Press*, 1.

[26] Ibid., 56, 76.

[27] Elliot Gorn,"'Goodbye Boys, I Die a True American': Homicide, Nativism, and Working-Class Culture in Antebellum New York City," *The Journal of American History* 74, no. 2 (September 1987): 406. For more on the "b'hoys," see: Peter Adams, *Bowery Boys: Street Corner Radicals and the Politics of Rebellion* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2005); Alvin Harlow, *Old Bowery Days* (New York: D. Appleton, 1931); Wilenz, *Chants Democratic*; Stott, *Workers in the Metropolis*; Alison Weiss, "'Shirtless and Unterrified, Leading the Marches of the World!' The Bowery B'hoys: America's Chosen Gangsters, Guides, and Guardian Angels 1840-1890," undergraduate thesis, Duke University, 2007.

Indeed, a major component of the political ideology was a disgust with middle-class weakness and sentimentality, and an encouragement of passion and lustiness. The hypocrites who "worship middle-class values," Walsh proclaimed, are

> men who are a mere connecting link between the animal and the vegetable kingdom . . . fellows that would not knock a man down in the street, because they haven't got strength enough to knock a cockroach down, fellows that won't whistle "We won't go home till morning" because they haven't wind enough; and that are not lascivious, because they have not got stamina enough in their composition to keep their backbone straight.[28]

Walsh romanticized an image of gladiatorial political combat. "[It is] the duty of every honest man to uphold honesty and honest men," he wrote, "and throw himself into the breach at the hazard of his political existence—standing unmoved the stabs, cuts, and shots of his assailants—fighting unaided, alone and successfully against fearful odds, to shield Freedom, in this her last foot-hold on earth."[29] Such politics became common in the Tammany Hall era, completely overturning Victorian codes. Members of Walsh's fraternity were often hired by Boss Tweed's political machine to act as "shoulder-hitters" at the polls on elections day. There, they would intimidate voters into casting ballots for the Democrats, and in return would often be given minor civic offices.[30] In the twentieth century, when such an ideology had mellowed, the labor racketeer Richard "Big Dick" Butler complained that "elections nowadays are sissy affairs. Nobody gets killed anymore and the ambulances and patrol wagons stay in their garages. . . . [Before,] to be a challenger at the polls you had to be a nifty boxer."[31] Particularly in Northern urban centers, then, the "libertine republicanism" of "aggressive masculinity" exerted a powerful influence on American culture, politics and literature.

The South, on the other hand, did not struggle as much with multiple, opposing views on manhood. There were, of course, a variety of subcultures, but not the same phenomenon of two, competing, dominant cultures as in the North. After all, the class that set the cultural and political standards in the South was far more homogenous, the product of a rigidly hierarchical society based almost entirely on a plantation economy. The overwhelmingly rural region did not have as strong or rapidly growing a middle class as the industrializing North. A strictly patriarchal societal order placed wealthy, white planters at the pinnacle of power, and as such they became the paragons of southern masculinity. Many historians argue that this patriarchal system solidified with the beginning of slavery: a kind of feudal lord, wielding virtually absolute power, was necessary to both protect, order, and discipline a household of male and female, black and white dependents. Such a gendered hierarchy extended even to yeomen households,

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[28] Michael Walsh, *Sketches of the Speeches and Writing of Michael Walsh, Including His Poems and Correspondence*, The Spartan Association, ed., (New York: Thomas McSpeddon, 1843), 11-12.
[29] Walsh, *Sketches*, 18.
[30] Wilenz, *Chants Democratic*, 198-200.
[31] Richard J. Butler and Joseph Driscoll, *Dock Walloper: The Story of "Big Dick" Butler* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1933), 65.

where children and wives expected their patriarchs to be just as strong, authoritative, occasionally brutal, and unquestionably obeyed as those of the planter elite.[32]

Historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown's *Southern Honor* analyzes these qualities as components of the southern culture of "honor." Besides the aforementioned Machiavellian qualities, a "southern gentleman" was expected to prove his "honor"—or his masculine courage, daring and virility—against any perceived slight on his or his family's reputation. From a southern boy's first years, Wyatt-Brown writes, "fighting, horse racing, gambling, swearing, drinking and wenching were all activities that tested [his] honor among his peers." When a southern boy hit adolescence, it was common and actually expected that sexual experiments would follow, usually with a slave. This was especially common among slave-owning families, but even southern boys who did not own female slaves could seek them out for sexual gratification. Male lust was regarded as a natural impulse, and to suppress it was an unhealthy denial of nature that could lead to "prissiness and effeminacy." A healthy sex life—without regard to marriage—was therefore natural and expected, "a point of honor" and "an informal rite of virilization."[33]

Northerners visiting the South often commented in mingled surprise and fascination on southern ideas of masculinity. While gender codes in the North were contested terrain between multiple, increasingly class-divided cultures, one Union officer commented that the entirety of the South "highly prizes virility" and "looks upon man as the lord of creation." Indeed, he wrote,

> It seems to me that the central trait of the 'chivalrous Southron' is an intense respect for virility. He will forgive almost any vice in a man who is manly; . . . If you will fight, . . . if you can ride a dangerous horse over a rough country, if you are a good shot . . . , if you do your level best on whiskey, if you are a devil of a fellow with women, in short, if you show vigorous masculine attributes he will grant you his respect.[34]

The South may not have boasted numerous brothels and burgeoning numbers of prostitutes, but it did have millions of women who, by virtue of being chattel property, could neither refuse sex with white men nor demand compensation. As Chapter Two will show, casual and official relations between white men and black women were extremely common within all social echelons—but perhaps especially among the slaveholding elite, who had the most access. One planter even defended his own wide-ranging sexual activities in his diary by referencing "the very greatest men" who had "been addicted to loose indulgences with women. " For example, he wrote, "Webster and Clay are notorious for it and President Harrison got his wife's niece by child."[35] In their history of sexuality in America, John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman hold that these kinds of affairs were so institutionalized that Southerners had a special term—the "gander months"—that referred to the late months of pregnancy, when husbands typically sought sex outside of marriage.[36]

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[32] For histories that address the southern patriarchal system, see: Jordan, *White Over black;* Johnson, *Soul by Soul*; McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery.*

[33] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* 164, 295, 296

[34] De Forest, *A Union Officer in the Reconstruction*, 185.

[35] D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters,* 95.

[36] Ibid., 95.

Unlike many northern men adrift in a female-starved city, most southern men—at least of the elite classes—did not have the same difficulty finding women. Nonetheless, southern men often evidenced a boredom and impatience with marriage. As the next section of this chapter will show, southern women were expected to adhere even more strictly to the mores of the "cult of true womanhood" than their northern counterparts. For many southern men, marriage threatened to be a stifling, confining institution that curbed their masculine powers. It was, therefore, often seen as a business arrangement, conducted in order to secure good business, land, or familial ties, but not requiring a man's full effort or attention. Virginian Senator John Randolph's advice to his nephew was that "few love-matches are happy ones. . . . After all, suitability is the true foundation for marriage."[37] South Carolina Senator James Henry Hammond agreed, explaining in a letter to his younger brother, Marcus Claudius Marcellus, that "Women were meant to breed—men to do the work of the world." They were ornaments or playthings, but "one soon tires" of the game and returns to the important doings of marketplace and battlefield, courthouse and cotton plantation.[38] Interestingly, however, Hammond did not appear to think that wives were meant to fulfill men's sexual urges. He had sexual relations with a number of his slaves while governor of South Carolina in the 1840s, and finally formed a long-term relationship with a slave woman while separated from his wife. He justified the liaison by explaining that his wife could not fulfill "the great craving of my nature."[39] Such an explanation, with its reference to helplessly, inherently lustful masculine sexuality, excused the practice at all levels. Even the Supreme Court of Kentucky refused to judge a white man insane because he wanted to marry the slave he had just emancipated. Although it acknowledged its adamant disapproval, the court declared that such concubinage occurred far too often to be excused on the grounds of mental instability.[40]

In most parts of the West, there was no Supreme Court to judge interracial relations, nor many urban centers with entrenched, competing cultures. Most of the antebellum West—roughly defined as the region extending west of the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean, much of it under foreign rule or still governed as territories rather than states—was a wide, wild frontier with very few white women, dotted with trading posts, forts, and occasional oases of small but burgeoning towns and cities. What culture and society did arise in the early years was quite alien to any other American region: in Mexican territory, it was secondary to Catholic, Mexican culture; in other territories, it was a contentious mix of European, Spanish American, and Indian elements. Even when territories came under American rule, as after the Mexican-American War, they remained culturally heterogeneous, male-dominated, and, according to many American women, horrifically "uncivilized." In a land of harsh climates, unforgiving terrain, dangerous Indians and brutal outlaws, where the majority of work was hard, manual labor in mining camps, on ranches and farms, or at trading posts, Victorian culture was starkly out of place. The antebellum West, then, was a world that vindicated America's regional variations of "aggressive manhood." It was a world where the cultivated traits of bravery, a fighting spirit, and disdain for "soft" living, as well as the disillusionment with white American femininity, could have an

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[37] Randolph to Dudley, February 5, 1822, quoted in Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* 202. For more on Southern views on courtship and marriage, see Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* and Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South.*

[38] James Henry Hammond to Marcellus Hammond, September 5, 1847, quoted in Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor,* 199-200.

[39] Senator James Henry Hammond, quoted in D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters,* 96.

[40] Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll,* 495.

outlet.[41] As the authors of *The Annals of San Francisco* described in 1855, "Gold dust was plentier than pleasure, pleasure more enticing than virtue. Fortune was the horse, youth in the saddle, dissipation the track, and desire the spur. Let none wonder that the time was the best ever made."[42]

In California, for example, some of the first men to race into the gold fields were wealthy members of trading and mining companies. The cost of passage was often extremely high, and a member had to agree to the company's bylaws: to behave "like a gentleman," to act honorably, and not to gamble, fight, drink excessively, or chase prostitutes in ports. Once on board, however, such rules totally dissolved: crew records report complete debauchery, as though all the men treated their journey as an unprecedented opportunity to openly flout all Victorian mores and societal strictures.[43] For many men, rich and poor, northern and southern, that is exactly what the trip out West was intended to be. Men of both regions' cultures of "aggressive masculinity" found unprecedented opportunity in the new territories. David Broderick, who was so successful in the Gold Rush that he became a California Senator, had been a bouncer in New York saloons, a member of the New York volunteer fire company, a renowned prize-fighter, and a personal friend and political ally of Mike Walsh.[44] David S. Terry, who became chief judge of the state Supreme Court, was a devout Southerner so dedicated to opening California's vast lands to slavery that he belligerently announced his intention of changing the state constitution "by striking out the clause prohibiting slavery . . . or, failing in that, to divide the state and thus open a portion of California to Southerners and their property."[45] Described even by friends as "truculent" and known as a renowned knife-fighter, Terry had a reputation for the kind of gladiatorial political combat that Mike Walsh would have been proud of. In his second year on the bench he'd slashed at a member of the San Francisco Vigilance Committee with his bowie knife. One week after the senatorial election in 1859, Terry challenged David Broderick to a duel. When Broderick's gun shot wildly into the ground, Terry took careful aim and shot Broderick fatally in the lung.[46] Outside of the political bull-ring, one young, illiterate Missourian who had run away from home at the age of sixteen to become a trapper, living among the Indians and even marrying two Indian women, became one of America's best-known folk heroes. A celebrated Indian-fighter and agent, a courier and scout during the Mexican-American War, and John C. Fremont's guide in the exploration of California, Kit Carson appeared to know the West like the back of his hand.[47]

Whether in the California gold mines, trading posts and towns in the Rocky Mountains and Mexico, or military expeditions into Mexican territory, the West invited, valorized, and elevated "aggressive masculinity." After all, the beneficial, taming influence of respectable white women was hardly ever available. As Chapters Four through Seven will further detail, however, many men appreciated and took advantage of this situation. After all, there certainly were women in the West, if a man cared to shed certain prejudices. Some men appeared to view the

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[41] See especially Amy Greenberg, Chapter One, "The New Frontier as a Safety Valve," in *Manifest Manhood,* 18—53.
[42] Frank Soulé, John H. Gihon, and Jim Nisbet, *The Annals of San Francisco* (1855), quoted in Hurtado, *Intimate Frontiers,* 5.
[43] Leonard Richards, *The California Gold Rush,* 21-23.
[44] Ibid., 5, 6, 27, 28.
[45] David S. Terry to Cornelia Terry, June 29, 1852, quoted in Ibid., 4, 5.
[46] Ibid., 4-6.
[47] Simmons, *Kit Carson and His Three Wives.*

vast stretch of the West in the same way many members of trading and mining companies viewed their ships: as a place where societal restrictions crumbled, and where old taboos became new, irresistible temptations. If one correspondent told it true, almost all the women in California were available. "As yet," the transplanted Bostonian William Perkins wrote, "we have no *wives* in California. Thousands of women there are, but these are all mistresses or independent. This state is so common that it excites no remark.*"* After all, Indian and Mexican women, or the multitudinous French prostitutes, were seen to be naturally suited to such a state. As for the prospect of respectable white women arriving with "civilizing" intentions, Perkins dubiously wrote that "virtue must put on some more pleasing aspect to enable her to conquer the formidable enemy already entrenched advantageously." Would men so easily turn from the sexually available, sensual, non-white women to pursue prim and pursed, middle-class white women? Perkins thought not. "It is too much to expect from weak male human nature in California," he apologized, "that a man ever so correctly inclined, should prefer the lean arm of a bonneted, ugly, board-shaped specimen of a descendent of the Puritans, to the rosy cheeked, full formed, sprightly, and elegant Spaniard."[48] As will be further explained in a later chapter, by "Spaniard" Perkins actually meant "Spanish American"—in other words, women considered to possess a rather dubious mix of "Mediterranean" blood (an inferior varietal to "Anglo Saxon") and native or even black heritage.

Adultery, prostitution, and premarital sex were considered excusable offenses in all regions of America in part because, as Hammond and Perkins declared, they were seen as "natural" to men's inherently lustful bodies. One of the main reasons for this adamant belief was an outpouring of antebellum medical tracts obsessed with defining and understanding sex and sexuality.[49] The human body was viewed as an incredibly complicated, delicate machine wired with a complex network of nerves. It was believed that, to keep the machine running smoothly, the wiring had to always be in perfect tune, and all the nerves synchronized. As one of the strongest and most important "passions" or "appetites," the sex drive was to be exceptionally maintained.

The heated arguments that characterized this medical debate, however, differed over the best way to go about this. One contingent of medical theorists, including the rather infamous Sylvester Graham, believed that the human body was like a rubber band. In its natural state, Graham argued, the body was "entirely destitute of sensibility." Frequent stimuli, however, whether in the form of spicy, exotic food, thrilling novels, or sexual activity, "irritate and debilitate the nerves of organic life, and induce in them, a state or morbid irritability, and thereby disorder all the organic functions of the system, and lead to the most painful and often the most

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[48] William Perkins, *Three Years in California: William Perkins' Journal of Life at Sonora 1849—1852*, eds Dale L Morgan and James R Scobie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 131, 252. It must be noted that there *were* available white women in California, but these were mostly French prostitutes. Yet many Americans still did not count some Europeans—especially those from "Latin" countries like France, Italy, and Spain—as "white." For more on French prostitutes in the West, see: Michael Rutter, *Upstairs Girls: Prostitution in the American West* (Helena, MT: Farcountry Press, 2005); Jacqueline Baker Barnhart, *The Fair But Frail: Prostitution in San Francisco, 1849—1900* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1986); Jeremy Agnew, *Brides of the Multitude: Prostitution in the Old West* (Lake City, CO,: Western Reflections Publishing Co, 2008).

[49] The fact that Alcott's *Young Man's Guide* went through twenty-one editions from 1833 to 1850 and Russell Trall's *Sexual Physiology* was reprinted twenty-eight times from 1866 to 1881 (both books quoted in the following paragraphs) reveal how "hungry Americans were for instruction about the meaning of sexuality." Sexual advice literature was "part of a health reform movement that was symptomatic of the quest for physical, as well as spiritual, perfection." D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 67.

fatal diseases."[50] In other words, such stimulation caused the rubber band to vibrate, grow taut and then flaccid, and finally erode its elasticity entirely.

A separate contingent of theorists, on the other hand, likened the sex drive to something more like a muscle: regular exercise kept it strong and healthy, while total abstinence made it atrophy. Charles Knowlton, for example, wrote in his popular tract *Fruits of Philosophy* that the sex drive "cannot be mortified with impunity. . . . A temperate gratification promotes the secretions, and the appetite for food; calms the restless passions; induces pleasant sleep; awakens social feelings; and adds a zest to life." Frederick Hollick agreed in his controversial, exceptionally detailed *Origin of Mankind,* stating that "the development and well-being of mankind . . . depends to a great extent, upon the due and proper gratification of our sexual feelings. Indeed, some theorists went so far as to picture the body as a kind of shaken champagne bottle: a certain release of sexual energy was necessary lest the build-up cause some kind of explosion. "There is a common error of opinion among young men," Graham wrote with disgust, "that health requires an emission of semen at stated periods, and that frequent nocturnal emissions in sleep, are not incompatible with health. All this is wrong—entirely, dangerously wrong!"[51] The problem, of course, was that, to many men, it was not dangerously wrong at all. The divide in medical opinion left plenty of room for the vindication of "libertine republicanism" and "aggressive masculinity."

Although medical experts (or those who pretended to be) could not agree on the correct approach to sex, almost all believed that men were inherently more sexual than women. "It is known by all," Dr. Luther Bell wrote in a popular medical tract on masturbation in 1840,

> That at that period denominated puberty, . . . the propensity described as amativeness by the phrenologists, naturally and spontaneously occupies no small space in the physical development, as well as the moral character of the [young man.] [He] feels within himself an aching void to be satisfied.[52]

Men's sexual urges were often described as "cravings" or "voids" needing to be filled, and the power and danger of their sexual appetites as volcanic. "I have known men who indulged morning, noon, and night," one writer avowed, "I have also known men to murder, in this way, three of four wives, in rapid succession, and the world is full of victims of this inordinate lust."[53]

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[50] Sylvester Graham, *A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity. Intended Also for the Serious Consideration of Parents and Guardians,* 4th ed. (1834; repr., Boston: George W. Light, 1838), 45.

[51] Charles Knowlton, *Fruits of Philosophy: Or, the Private Companion of Young Married People* (New York: 1832), in Helen L. Horowitz, ed, *Attitudes Toward Sex in the Antebellum Period: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston; New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006), 63. Frederick Hollick, *The Origin of Life: A Popular Treatise on the Philosophy and Physiology of Reproduction* (New York: Nafis & Cornish, 1845), in Ibid., 105; Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Physiology* (1815), quoted in Charles Knowlton, "Gonorrhea Dormientium, *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal,* 27, no 1 (August 10, 1842): 11-15; Graham, *A Lecture to Young Men*, 85.

[52] Luther V. Bell M.D., *An Hour's Conference with Fathers and Sons, in Relation to a Common and Fatal Indulgence of Youth* (Boston: Whipple and Damrell, 1840), in Horowitz, *Attitudes Toward Sex*,78.

[53] Thomas Nichols, M.D., *Esoteric Anthropology: A Comprehensive and Confidential Treatise on the Structure, Functions, Passionate Attractions and Perversions, True and False Physical and Social Conditions, and the Most Intimate Relations of Men and Women* (New York: Published by the author, 1854) in Ibid., 117. The same notion of excessive male sexual indulgence as fatal to women was expressed by Dr. Russell Trall, *Sexual Physiology: A Scientific and Popular Exposition of the Fundamental Problems in Sociology* (New York: Miller, Wood & Co., 1867), 243-44.

Women were believed to possess the power (directly related to their own "passionlessness") to quell these raging appetites. "You will be my law," one man wrote to his fiancée in a letter, and another stated "you will cleanse me." Elia Nason confessed to his fiancée Mia Bigelow "Oh Mi how intensely do I long to see you—to feel you—to put these very hands . . . in your bosom—that soft delicious bosom. . . . I shall tear you to pieces. . . . My passions are terrible and none but you could master them."[54] Such letters point to the way these scientific views had permeated popular thought. After all, many reasoned, they seemed to be easily observed: men could produce sperm at an astonishing rate per day, and even into old age, while women produced only one egg per month and became sterile after menopause. That such biology would be related to sexual desire was seen to be perfectly demonstrated in every corner of the animal kingdom. "The female everywhere refuses sexual union with the male, except at the appointed season," wrote Thomas Nichols, who was actually considered quite radically progressive in his sexual views. "Compulsion at any time, and especially during pregnancy, cannot be called beastly, for it would be a libel on the brutes. But what are men to do! I really cannot answer. They must do the best they can."[55] For many men, of course, the "best they can" meant "with whatever woman is available." In urban areas, the most available women were prostitutes. In the South, the most available women were slaves, or perhaps freedwomen. And in many parts of the West, if Perkins is to be believed, a great many women were available—as long as one did not mind prostitutes or non-white women. What almost all men in all regions agreed on, however, was that respectable white women, even when *around*, were never openly available—nor, as the following chapters will show, always desirable.

"*Love of home, of children, and of domestic duties are the only passions they feel"*[56]
White Womanhood

In her ground-breaking article on the "cult of true womanhood," historian Barbara Welter explains that the "cult of domesticity" and the required attributes of a "true woman" were established in the antebellum period as mainstays against the social, political, and economic changes that men felt irresistibly sweeping them along. Because the nineteenth-century man, a "busy builder of bridges and railroads, at work long hours in a materialistic society," felt guilty that he had turned America into "one vast counting-house," he established woman as a "hostage" to the neglected religious values of his forbears. While the public sphere was buffeted by the storms of progress, the private, domestic sphere was supposed to be an oasis of calm. "In a society where values changed frequently," Welter explained, "where fortunes rose and fell with frightening rapidity, where social and economic mobility provided instability as well as hope, one thing at least remained the same—a true woman was a true woman, wherever she was found."[57]

Indeed, unlike the period's numerous, competing views on masculinity, Americans of multiple classes and regions appeared to more or less agree on the qualities of a "true woman." As Welter shows, almost all authors who wrote about women in the mid-nineteenth century used

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[54] Lawrence Chamberlain to Fannie Adams, n.d 1852, Chamberlain Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliff College; Frank Lillie to Frances Crane, Sept 24, 1894, Crane Papers, Chicago Historical Society; Elias Nason to Mira Bigelow, June 19, 1833, Elias Nason Papers, American Antiquarian Society.
[55] Nichols, *Esoteric Anthropology,* in Horowitz, *Attitudes Toward Sex,* 115.
[56] William Acton quoted in D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters,* 70.
[57] Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 151-152.

the phrase without defining it, assuming that all readers would know what they meant.[58] While men of wealthy, respectable classes could still flout Victorian codes and ascribe to cultures of "aggressive masculinity," it was widely acknowledged that only the most degraded, low-class women ignored the requirements of "true womanhood."[59] Even women who identified as feminists or campaigned for women's rights, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Eliza Farnham, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Angelina Grimké, did so without questioning these attributes and duties.[60] Unlike the masculine cultural world, then, no two versions of femininity competed for hegemony in the antebellum period. Furthermore, as Tocqueville himself noticed, Victorian female education and the separation of male and female spheres was evident in all regions of America. This section will therefore acknowledge certain regional exaggerations of and variations on the "cult of true womanhood," but will emphasize a more national trend.

Victorian lithographs abound with images of delicate, willowy, snow-white women with tiny hands and feet, rosebud mouths, and rather childlike faces. This, of course, was the ideal rather than the reality, but one that many American women styled and dressed themselves to imitate. Corsets squeezed their bodies into hourglasses, cinching wasp waists and pushing up broad bosoms. Ballooning leg-of-mutton sleeves and voluminous hoop skirts ensured that fashionable women could hardly move around without fear of knocking things over, getting tangled in passersby, or tripping over themselves. In order to ensure that her skirts did not begin to bunch up over her hoop skirts, or that the whole, rickety apparatus wouldn't sway like a capsizing ship, a woman had to take tiny, measured steps. Hems of dresses trailed on the ground, making the obvious statement that a genteel woman could keep it clean only if she never walked anywhere. Fashionable magazines like *Harper's Bazaar* gave women all sorts of tips for achieving the look of the fashion plates. They advised women to always have their bodies slightly bent, giving them a soft, sloped-shouldered, vulnerable look. If a woman wanted that tiny, bee-stung mouth, she was advised to repeat a sequence of words beginning with "p," like "peas, prunes, and prisms." Elizabeth Cady Stanton once stated that she never bothered to give feminist literature to any woman who had the "prune and prisms look" on her face.[61]

Enough American women apparently achieved this look to have foreign observers commenting on them as "sylphlike," "ultra-attenuated," "etherealized," "fragile," "frail," and "slight," with a "wax doll prettiness."[62] The British actress and author Frances Kemble wrote that American women looked as though "a puff of wind would break them in half or a drop of water soak them through."[63] Such delicacy was also one of the first comparisons white, American men made between their own women and those they met while traveling in Indian or Mexican territory. Although many professed shock at the looseness of dress among Indians and Spanish American women, a good number professed they far preferred it. "Among the Mexican women,

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[58] Ibid.,151.

[59] A number of works examine these subaltern groups. See: Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986); Mary Odem, *Delinquent Daughters : Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 1982; and the aforementioned works on prostitution in the American West.

[60] Each of these women will be quoted as supporting aspects of the "cult of true womanhood" in the following section

[61] Lois Banner, *American Beauty* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 5, 6, 49, 55.

[62] Ibid., 45.

[63] Francis Kemble Butler, *Journal of a Residence in America* (Paris: A and W. Galignani, 1835), 155.

young and old, corsets are unknown," George Kendall wrote on the Texas Santa Fe Expedition. Dressed with this alluring "*abandon,"* their forms had "a roundness, a fulness, which the divinity of tight lacing never allows her votaries."[64] In his novel *Typee,* which supposedly related the true story of his captivity by Pacific island Indians, Melville waxed poetic about the idyllic Eden where the Indian women "were not filled with envyings of each other's charms, nor displaying the ridiculous affectations of gentility, nor yet moving in whalebone corsets, like so many automatons, but free, inartificially happy, and unconstrained."[65] Perhaps, then, women who attempted to live up to lithographic standards were obeying the dictates of fashion more than the desires of many American men.

Fashion itself appeared to follow the dictates of science, which insisted on female delicacy, purity, and passionlessness. Measurements of height, weight, and cranium size were published as evidence that women were the weaker, subservient sex. Adherents to the notion of climatology asserted that America's climate, in many places more extreme than that of Western Europe, made its women particularly frail. Elizabeth Cady Stanton publicly lectured on her belief that the difference between English and American climates caused American women to be "more highly wrought, physically more delicate and slender, their voices pitched in a higher key." Physiognomists argued that small features indicated virtue and a "great delicacy of sentiment."[66] Doctors insisted that women, primarily because they only ovulated once a month, were simply not naturally sexual. Thomas Nichols went so far as to suggest that a woman who had sex more than once a month was "violat[ing] natural law."[67] Dr. William Sanger found himself flummoxed by the prostitutes he interviewed, who insisted that the majority of them had entered into the profession of their own inclination. Sanger decided that these women were perversions, an exception to majority rule. "The full force of sexual desire is seldom known to a virtuous woman," he asserted, in part because nature had made males hypersexual. The natural frigidity of women was therefore nature's "beneficent design of repressing those evils which must result from mutual appetite."[68] The British physician William Acton, who was widely read and respected in America, asserted that his vast medical experience had clearly shown him that "the majority of women are not much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind. . . . Love of home, of children, and of domestic duties are the only passions they feel."[69]

Whether these scientific ideas helped to create cultural norms and societal expectations or whether the latter led to science's attempts at validation, is hard to determine. Cultural and scientific ideas seemed to complement each other, and to use each other as proof. Thus the plethora of advice manuals and etiquette books that were published for women echoed and elaborated on these views. Woman's physical delicacy was seen to complement the delicacy of

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[64] George Wilkins Kendall, *Narrative of the Texan Santa Fe Expedition: Comprising A Description of a Tour Through Texas, and Across the Great Southwestern Prairies, the Camanche and Caygua Hunting Grounds, with an Account of the Suffering from Want of Food, Losses from Hostile Indians, and Final Capture of the Texans and Their March, as Prisoners, to the City of Mexico, in Two Volumes* (London: Wiley & Putnam, 1844), 1: 318-319.
[65] Herman Melville, *Typee; or, a Narrative of a Four Month's Residence Among the Natives of a Valley of the Marquesas Islands; or, a Peep at Polynesian Life* (London: John Murray, 1847), 140.
[66] Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "On the Social, Educational, Religious, and Political Position of Women in America," Delivered at Prince's Hall, 25 June, 1833, Stanton Papers, Library of Congress; Banner, *American Beauty,* 50-52.
[67] Nichols, *Esoteric Anthropology,* in Horowitz, *Attitudes Toward Sex in Antebellum America,* 115.
[68] William W. Sanger, *The History of Prostitution: Its Extent, Causes, and Effects Throughout the World* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1858), 488-489.
[69] William Acton quoted in D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters,* 70.

her character, her physical weakness to complement her submission to her husband, and her asexuality to complement her primary role as mother and nurturer. Virginia Cary's *Letters on Female Character,* ostensibly written to a young female friend after her mother's death, became a very popular advice manual. To Cary, the Bible was an excellent source on the debate over "woman's place." Since Eve had been created from Adam's rib, she was "*formed for man,* and therefore must continue in contented subordination to his authority." Furthermore, since woman had led man into original sin, "it is additionally incumbent on her to make up to man, by dutiful obedience, for the evil she has occasioned him." For these Christian reasons, Cary explained, a woman's place was solely within the home, and her entire world was to revolve around the desires of her husband, which should always come before her own. To Cary, one quintessential virtue was meekness. A truly perfect woman was virtually invisible, shrinking "from the public gaze, like the meek-eyed violet, and shed[ding] the incense of her good works around, so as to mark the spot where she blooms in lowly retirement." Just as the harsh sun caused an abhorrent darkening of pure, lily-white skin, so "The unchecked gaze of the world tarnishes like the meridian beam of a summer sun." Meekness was to be complemented by passionlessness and gentleness, since Cary proclaimed "there is something indescribably repulsive in a boisterous, passionate, blunt, course female." In fact, self-will of any sort was dangerous for women. To be self-willed was to be independent and domineering, a perversion in the female sex. "The very first sign of moral and intellectual improvement in the sex," Cary explained, "is a readiness to give up what is generally dear to human beings—their own will and wishes."[70]

Once a woman had cultivated these traits of delicacy, meekness, submission and selflessness, she was perfectly suited for marriage. As if understanding that a man, while appreciating these virtues in a housekeeper, nurse, and nanny, may not find them entirely romantic or alluring, Cary counseled women not to expect romance from a man after marriage. Men, she explained, would be too busy with other affairs, so women could relinquish romance and sink into natural, deep affection. After all, she explained, "love is in fact a dangerous passion, which must be subjected to vigorous control."[71] While Cary was certainly popular, her pessimistic views on love were not mainstream during this period. Love was, indeed, vaunted as woman's highest emotion—but a woman's love was expected to be purely spiritual, without even an understanding, much less a feeling, of lust. Eliza Farnham's work *Woman and Her Era* described the supposed nature of woman's love: "She is inexperienced in the most intimate relations," Farnham explained, clearly believing that the majority of women subscribed to the Victorian mandate of chastity. "She believes long and long, that the same expressions of love which satisfy her—the language of the beaming, tender eye, the innocent, clinging lips, the clasped hands, and the deep, tremulous tones . . . must satisfy her lover also. And if she finds an encroaching ardor in him, she is blind to its real character." Women's love, then, was the fairy-tale variety, grounded in romantic daydreams rather than earthy feelings of lust. For this reason, man was believed to always be the initiator of sexual relations. Woman, totally innocent about sex and possessing no natural desire for it, had to be effectively coaxed and wheedled into participating. And even then, Farnham said, "She will shrink instinctively from the manifestation [of sexual passion] . . . . It is forever the Man, who first acts from sense and then appeals *to* it in

[70] Virginia Cary, *Letters on Female Character Addressed to A Young Lady, on the Death of Her Mother* (Richmond, VA: Ariel Works, 1830), vi, 25, 61, 62, 192. Italics in original.
[71] Ibid., 132.

Woman."[72] Such a perspective seemed to imply that all varieties of sex, whether within marriage or without, were dangerously similar to rape and seduction. Rather than being a marital joy, sex was often portrayed as a tragic deflowering.

To Farnham, sex was repulsive and degrading to women. Her views on marriage were almost as unromantic as Cary's, though the latter assured women that they needn't fear excessive attentions from their husband. Farnham, conversely, warned women that "What Man wants of Woman, as a general rule, is the gratification of his animal passions." To Farnham, the commandment of wives to obey their husbands required men's bodies to violate and degrade women's, causing "the spiritual to prostitute itself to the sensual and gross." For a respectable woman to maintain her dignity, Farnham explained, she *had* to maintain her passionlessness, to refuse his sensual advances. "It is a fall for my sex when it descends to meet his at the level of sense," she wrote. "In sensuality she descends to him, where he is sovereign, and both are dwarfed and depraved by entering his realm." It was the woman's job to tame a man's sexual appetite, and to redirect his interests to more a spiritual love. "The purity of Woman is the everlasting barrier against which the tides of man's sensual nature surge," Farnham wrote.[73] Dr. Redfield, quoted often in Farnham's works, wrote that a woman "finds a man's love impulsive, impetuous, demanding, overbearing, selfish, sensual, impure and gross, and she puts checks upon it; moderates it, guides it, subjects it to her own; chastens and purifies it."[74] Many marriage manuals of the period advised sexual restraint in marriage, desiring true union to be more spiritual than sensual. Court cases allowing women to divorce men for imposing excessive sexual demands reflect a growing belief that the state had the power to regulate male sexuality, and that the ideal marriage was one of sexual restraint. [75]

Of course, such views on women's asexuality and ascetic marriages could not have been true for everyone in American society. It is certain that numerous women took great pleasure in sex, and that many marriages were sexually fulfilling for both husband and wife. The fact that Americans in the antebellum period were particularly private about their love lives and sexual desires makes it difficult to ascertain the extent to which people truly internalized these societal mores. Nonetheless, the fact that almost all the most numerous and popular publications concerning these subjects insisted on these "natural" truths speaks to their influence on society. These works must therefore have had quite a profound impact on many women's attitudes and approaches to sex, and on many men's decision whether or not to get married. A sampling of various women's personal writings attests to the power this ideology had on their perceptions of their own sexuality. "What terrible temptations lie in the way of your sex!" Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote in a letter to her husband, referring to men's rampant sexual appetites. "Till now I never realized it—for tho I did love you with an almost insane love before I married you I never knew yet or felt the pulsation which showed me that I could be tempted in that way." Stowe insisted that she had never felt so much as a stirring of sensuality, further claiming that "there never was a moment when I felt anything by which you could have drawn me astray—for I loved you as I now love God."[76]Angela Grimké wrote to her fiancé just a few months before her marriage that she thought it repulsive that men believed "seriously that women were made to

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[72] Farnham, *Woman and Her Era,* 2: 89-90.
[73] Ibid., 289, 77, 95.
[74] Dr. Redfield quoted in Ibid., 138.
[75] Griswold, "Law, Sex, Cruelty, and Divorce," 732, 733.
[76] Harriet Beecher Stowe to husband, 1845, quoted in Cott, "Passionlessness," 234.

gratify their animal appetites, *expressly* to minister to their pleasure." Lest her own husband expect such sexual submission from her, Grimké assured him "my soul abhors such a base letting down of the high dignity of my nature as a woman. . . . In truth I must say that I never was reconciled to the compound [relat]ions of marriage."[77]

Marriage was thus often seen as a damper to sexual passions rather than an instigator or vindication. Many men must have perceived marriage not only as the end of dalliances with various degraded women, but of sexual desire entirely. If the aforementioned sources were to be believed, white women were far too delicate, refined, and virtuous to engage in sex for any other reason except reproduction, much less to ever express their enjoyment of it. Such a belief lends a new urgency to Thomas Nichols' question "But what are men to do?" For many men the answer lay within the ideology itself. According to the "cult of true womanhood," only white women were entirely chaste, pure, and virtuous. The belief in the inherent sensuality and lasciviousness of "colored" women—whether Indian, black, Spanish American or other—had a far longer legacy than that of Victorian views on white womanhood.

"Hot constitution'd Ladies possess a temper hot and lascivious"[78]

Racial Sexuality

Scholars in a variety of disciplines now generally agree that race does not actually exist, at least in biological terms, since it bears no intrinsic relationship to human physical variations. Various studies have shown greater genetic variation between brothers of the same race than between men of different races, and scientists at Penn State have recently found that the mutation for white skin involves a change of just one letter of DNA code out of the 3.1 billion letters in the human genome. Historians hold that the idea of "race" only came about in the nineteenth century, when new scientific fields began to associate it with certain qualities that, before, had been associated with class, religion, and even climate. Race, then, is very real in historical terms, but only as a social construct. [79]

Historian Evelyn Higginbotham suggests that scholars therefore use race as a "metalanguage," as it has always been used to construct and represent other social and power relations like gender, class, and sexuality. In certain societies, she argues, "racial demarcation is endemic to their sociocultural fabric and heritage," their laws, economy, institutions, customs, culture and philosophies." Gender, too, is therefore "inextricably linked to and even determined

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[77] Angelina Grimké to Theodore Dwight Weld, March 4, 1838, in *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angeline Grimké Weld, and Sarah Grimké*, ed. Gilbert Barnes and D.L Dumond (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1934), 2: 587.

[78] William Smith *New Voyage to Guinea* (1744), quoted in Elise LeMire, *Miscegenation: Making Race in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 28.

[79] A brief presentation of various scientific, anthropological, and historical works (including the studies mentioned) that define race as a social construct include: Audrey Smedly, "Race and the Construction of Human Identity," *American Anthropologist*, New Series 100, no. 3 (Sept. 1998): 690; Rick Weiss, "Scientists Find A DNA Change That Accounts For White Skin" *The Washington Post*, December 16, 2005; Faye Harrison, "The Persistent Power of 'Race' in the Cultural and Political Economy of Racism," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24 (1995): 47--74; Ritchie Witzig, "The Medicalization of Race: Scientific Legitimization of a Flawed Social Construct, *Annals of Internal Medicine* 125 no. 8 (October 1996): 675--679; Hannah Franziska Augstein, ed, *Race : the origins of an idea, 1760-1850* **(**Bristol, England : Thoemmes Press, 1996); George Frederickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2002).

by racial identity."[80] From the first days of contact, white Europeans and Americans began to associate skin color with certain religious tendencies, societal constructs, gender norms, and sexual practices. In nineteenth-century America, these solidified into a racial spectrum that encompassed a prism of colors, yet maintained strict poles of "black" and "white."[81] For this reason, certain races that were not considered "black," such as Indians or Mexicans, were nonetheless felt to possess a number of "black" traits, such as laziness, hyper-sexuality, and cowardice, by virtue of being placed nearer the darker pole of the racial spectrum. Similarly, mixed-race people were perceived to have certain "whiter" traits because they were closer to the white pole.[82]

Gender, like race, is a social construct with apparent biological foundations—in this case, sex—that has proved extremely mutable over time. From the Renaissance to the antebellum period, for example, Western associations with white femininity changed from lasciviousness and sin to purity, chastity, and virtue. Yet from the first writings of European travelers in Africa to America's most entrenched period of slavery, Western concepts of black women's sexuality resisted change.[83] Darkness of skin color, hair, and eye—from Shakespeare's sonnets to European travelogues to American colonists' diaries and letters—translated into female passion and sensuality.[84] The following section therefore details white European and American *perceptions* of non-white social practices like polygamy, common-law marriages, prostitution and pre-marital sex rather than the reality. While the nature of these practices was rooted in such diverse realities as religious ideology, cultural beliefs, and the desperation of poverty, whites interpreted them as evidence of the inherent lasciviousness of "dark" peoples.

Accounts of African women began to proliferate in the seventeenth century as Europeans became deeply enmeshed in the profitable slave trade. Many of them quoted Pliny and Iulius Solinus's ancient accounts of Africans to substantiate their claims that black women were "common," since they went about naked, marriage was unknown, and chastity ignored.[85] Reports of European travelers invariably mentioned that African men and women appeared to have

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[80] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 17, no. 2 (Winter, 1992): 252, 254.

[81] Frederick Hollick, in his piece on race, wrote that "The human species has its gradations, and may be considered a chain, the links of which are the different varieties, some of whom are evidently superior to others, while the Caucasian, or white variety, is superior to all the rest." He went on to explain that the black race was at the bottom, so near to apes, in fact, that African chimpanzees often raped African women. Frederick Hollick, *An Inquiry into the Rights, Duties, and Destinies, of the Different Varieties of the Human Race, with a View to a Proper Consideration of the Subjects of Slavery, Abolition, Amalgamation, and Aboriginal Rights*. (New York: W.B. & T. Smith, 1843), 7; Frederick Hollick, *The Origin of Life and Process of Reproduction in Plants and Animals* (1878; repr., Philadelphia: David McKay, 1902), 485.

[82] As this subject is a main focus of this dissertation, the extensive historiography will not be cited in a single footnote. However, for works dealing specifically with the black/white binary in the South and West, see Jordan, *White Over Black*; Stephanie Cole and Allison Parker, eds., *Beyond Black & White: Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the U.S. South and Southwest* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004).

[83] Jordan, *White Over Black*, 263.

[84] In his sonnets, Shakespeare's "dark lady" is "as black as night, as dark as hell." The Dark Lady sequence (sonnets 127–152), is overtly sexual and passionate, contrasted with the more spiritual love expressed in the "Fair Youth" sequence. Robert Matz, *The World of Shakespeare's Sonnets: An Introduction* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2008), 111. For more on depictions of the "dark lady" in fictional and travel literature, see: Pisarz-Ramírez, "Blurring the Boundaries of Gender," 58; Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

[85] Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 27.

rampant and random sex. In a description that suggests horror, fascination, and a veiled attempt at vicarious participation, the oft-quoted fourteenth-century writer Leo Africanus wrote that at night all the men and women of an African village cloistered themselves in one cottage, "each man choosing his [woman] which hee had most fanciee unto" and each woman, supposedly, offering no resistance.[86] By 1622, the explicit association of blackness with hyper-sexuality was so established that one traveler among the "Maudingos" of Cassan had to make excuses for the exceptional chastity of the newly married women he encountered, who "observe[ed] herin a shamefast modestie, not to be looked for, among such a kinde of *black* or barbarous people."[87]

Almost all European travelogues agreed that black women's favored sexual partners were white men. As William Smith wrote in his 1744 account of Guinea, "hot constitution'd" African women possessed a "temper hot and lascivious, making no scruple to prostitute themselves to the Europeans for a very slender profit, so great is their inclination to white men."[88] Besides the incredible ease and nonchalance with which they engaged in sexual relations, African women were reported to be astonishingly fertile. Travelers often noted that African women worked the entire time they were pregnant, never resorting to the "lying in" common to European women, nor even possessing a nurse. When the child was born, Europeans agreed that the women returned to their work the very next day, suckling their newborns by handing them their giant, distended breasts over their shoulders.[89]

In 1810, a Hottentot woman who was given the Dutch name "Sarah Bartmann" was toured around Europe as part of a titillating freak show, so popular that various royal courts demanded to gape at her. Advertised as the "Hottentot Venus," she was reported to have atrociously large buttocks and breasts, and was depicted as virtually naked, gnawing on a pipe and making lusty grabs at gawking spectators. By the nineteenth century, European notions about black women had become so entrenched that the woman was showcased not as representing a unique deformity, but embodying proof of the grotesque femininity and perverted sexuality of all African women. Europeans were so fascinated by these apparently inherent African traits that, upon her death, Bartmann's body was dissected and described in great detail in a book by two French scientists. They emphasized the enormous enlargement of her sexual organs—which anthropologists now state resulted from the tribe's cultural ritual of manipulating the labia to cause hypertrophy –as biological proof for black women's hyper-sexuality. On display in a museum, widely published in medical pieces, and discussed from Europe to the Americas, Sarah Bartmann's genitalia became the symbol for black femininity throughout the nineteenth century.[90]

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[86] Leo Africanus "Observations of Africa, taken out of John Leo in His Nine Books, by Master Pory," quoted in Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 29.

[87] Richard Jobson, *The Golden Trade: or a Discovery of the River Gambra, and the Golden Trade of the Aethiopians* (1628: repr., New York: Da Capo Press, 1968), 56.

[88] William Smith *New Voyage to Guinea* (1744), quoted in LeMire, *Miscegenation*, 28.

[89] Morgan gives a number of examples of these descriptions in travelogues. See Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 35—41.

[90] Sander Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (Autumn, 1985): 213-216. The original medical piece was published as: Georges Cuvier, "Extraits d'observations faites sur le cadaver d'une femme connue a Paris et a Londres sous le nom de Venus Hottentote," *Memoires du Museum d'histoire naturelle*, 3 (1817).

Figure 1.1: In this depiction, the "Hottentot Venus"—her notorious backside hugely exaggerated—is so lascivious that she lustily gropes after a well-dressed, wealthy white woman. The rope that surrounds her seems more designed to keep her from inappropriately touching the white spectators than the other way around. Sebastien Coeure, *The Hottentot Venus in the Slaon of the Duchess of Berry,* 1830, watercolor on paper, Courtesy of the Archives Charmet/The Bridgeman Art Libary

As historian Jennifer Morgan argues in her work *Laboring Women*, these depictions of African women's promiscuousness, fecundity, and propensity for hard labor were the foundations on which American slaveholders built an institution that relied on female labor and fertility. A woman who, in her native land, was reported to ignore marital rites could be totally denied them in America. A woman who birthed, nursed, and then neglected children in such a bestial manner could be relied upon to do so within an institution that gave her the same status as a breeding cow. Finally, a woman who was believed to possess such an uncontrollable sexual appetite that reports claimed she mated with African apes and lustily chased after white men was an ideal tool for the satiation of the latter's own sexual urges.[91] Two stereotypes of female sexuality thus arose in the antebellum South: the roly-poly, motherly, doting "Mammy," who was usually past child-bearing age; and her antithesis, the young, promiscuous "Jezebel." In a society where miscegenation was so rampant that travelers almost always commented on it, the "Jezebel" was a convenient scapegoat for white male adultery, rape, and seduction. According to the prevailing racial ideology, white men were not only exonerated from rape (because black

[91] The idea that African women mated with apes had become so widespread by the eighteenth century that even Thomas Jefferson commented on it. Believing that the males of one species preferred females of the next highest species, he argued that black males preferred white females "as uniformly as is the preference of the Oranootan for the black women over those of his own species." Jefferson quoted in Monique Scott, *Rethinking Evolution in the Museum: Envisioning African Origins* (New York: Routledge 2007), 25; For more examples of reports claiming that these liaisons occurred, see Morgan, *Laboring Women,* 46—47.

women were thought never to refuse their advances), but also blamed black "Jezebels" for seduction.[92]

Antebellum literature—whether personal, like diaries and letters, or public, like novels and travelogues—very rarely spoke of desire for fully black women. Of course, white men actively pursued these women, but discussions of such relations or admissions of attraction almost always centered on mixed-race black women. Ideas about black women's bestial sexuality seem to have become so entrenched that only a mingling of superior, white blood could excuse white men's confessions of desire. In the majority of literary portrayals, mixed-race women were referred to as "quadroons."[93] While this term initially referred to a person who was one-fourth black, it came to connote almost any combination of black and white racial mixture. This study will therefore echo the language of antebellum literature and refer to these mixed-race black women as "quadroons"—or, when explicitly stated by a contemporary, "mulattas." To emphasize the point that only mixed-race black women were *openly* discussed and pursued as sexually desirable mistresses, this dissertation will limit its analysis to that category.

In romantic fiction, a quadroon's desirability was based primarily on the ownership of her body. Almost every male character who encountered or fell in love with a quadroon fantasized about owning her body. In Lydia Maria Child's *A Romance of the Republic,* the man who bought the beautiful quadroon Rosabella smiled as he thought to himself that " he had acquired complete control of her destiny" and could "hide her away and keep his own secret," while she would be forced to "be satisfied with any arrangement he chose to make."[94] In this case, fiction appeared to closely represent reality: the quadroon Harriet Jacobs recalled in her memoir that her master, Dr. Norcom, "told me I was his property" and "that I must be subject to his will in all things," swearing "by heaven and earth that he would compel me to submit to him."[95] In fictional representations of this desire, the quadroon concubine was made all the more desirable because her white blood was almost always from some distinguished American family. A number of stories even linked her blood to that of Jefferson, who was rumored at this time to have had an affair with his slave Sally Hemings.[96] The quadroon who appeared in the literature, then, was almost always described as "noble" with a "queenly bearing," though descriptions of her body were far more sexual than those of white women.[97] Finally, the literature often indulged the fantasy of polygamy, providing the white, male protagonist with both a legitimate, white wife and a secret, mixed-race concubine he only pretended to marry.

Antebellum views on Indian women's sexuality were slightly more complex than the blatant promiscuity attributed to black women. Although their dark skin was, again, seen as an indication of their degraded nature, Indian women had the ironic advantage in the nineteenth century of having, at least in the mind of the East Coast public, virtually disappeared. After Indian Removal in the 1830s, Americans had to venture West to encounter Indians—and by the time of the Mexican-American War and the California Gold Rush, Indians had been so long gone

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[92] White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?,* 38.

[93] Monique Guillory, "Some Enchanted Evening on the Auction Block: The Cultural Legacy of the New Orleans Quadroon Balls," University of Michigan, 1999.

[94] Lydia Maria Child, *A Romance of the Republic* (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1867), 67.

[95] Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* 62.

[96] For more on the story of Jefferson and Hemings, see Annette Gordon-Reed, *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press 1997).

[97] These terms appear repetitively in multiple literary works analyzed in this dissertation. Specific examples and citations will appear in Chapters Two and Three.

from the East Coast that western travelers invariably expressed great curiosity and excitement about seeing them. Almost always, however, they also expressed disappointment. Many admitted that they had cherished an ideal of the American Indian as a "noble savage," only to often find them in reality small, diseased, poor, and altogether pathetic.[98] This confusion rested on the juxtaposition of two, opposing portrayals of American Indians in American culture: the "good," generous Indian of the Pocahontas variety, and the "bad," savage Indian of the type portrayed in captivity narratives.[99] Such a dichotomy was present from the very first Indian encounters, but gained an immediacy in the antebellum period. Literary portrayals of the "noble savage" became extremely popular at the same time as frightening reports of warring, raping, kidnapping western Indians spread across the nation.

As historian Rayna Green has pointed out, this same dichotomy pertained to Indian women, who were either negatively portrayed as jealous, promiscuous, savage "squaw" figures or beautiful, liberty-loving, generous "Pocahontas" types.[100] Nonetheless, both figures were associated with female promiscuity, or at least sexual desire for white men, since even Pocahontas betrayed her tribe for the love of a white man. American cultural thought about Indian women, then, was in agreement about their particular adoration of white men and sexual boldness (after all, Pocahontas went against her father's wishes), but more ambiguous about the nature of that sexuality. While early accounts like Amerigo Vespucci's descriptions insisted that Indian women "go about naked and are very libidinous" and that "when they had the opportunity of copulating with Christians, . . . they defiled and prostituted themselves," there was also a major cultural trend in the nineteenth century that romanticized Pocahontas types, whose sexuality was portrayed as beneficial to white men.[101] Nonetheless, new contact with western tribes appeared to contradict the romantic images of the disappeared "noble savages" of the Northeast and confirm the savagery and primitivism of early accounts. Both the first European colonists and nineteenth-century western migrants constantly commented on the Indians' near nakedness, polygamy, and premarital intercourse, all of which were seen as evidence of their natural promiscuity. John Smith was distressed when young Indian women attempted to welcome him into the tribe by offering to sleep with him, and western travelers reported that Indian women often prostituted themselves to white travelers and were given away as wives and concubines to seal treaties and agreements. The fact that Indian women appeared to accept and even invite these situations made many American men suppose that they were as naturally libidinous as black women.[102]

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[98] More examples of this "disappointment" will be detailed in Chapters Four and Eight.

[99] The very first captivity narrative, in which the Indians were portrayed as savages incapable of civilization or religion, was Mary Rowlandson's *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God,* published in 1682 but still well-known in the nineteenth century. Such publications significantly increased in the antebellum period, including famous works by Mary Jemison and Olive Oatman.

[100] Green, "The Pocahontas Perplex."

[101] Vespucci, quoted in Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian,* 10. The romanticization and sexualization of Pocahontas in literature will be further detailed in Chapter Five.

[102] D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Relations,* 7—8; Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian,* 7—10; It must be noted that, while traditional Indian practices did involve polygamy, openness to premarital sex, and the use of women as "gifts" to seal agreements, Indian women most often were forced into prostitution because of dire circumstances in the West. As Hurtado writes, "prostitution was not a usual part of California Indian society, but native women took it up in the most desperate circumstances. Starvation, Indian wars, and sexual assaults shaped their sexual lives. The low prices that Indians received for their sexual services certified their low racial and sexual status among California's prostitutes." Hurtado, *Intimate Frontiers,* 87.

Timothy Osborn, in his trip to the California gold mines, appears to have confronted the squaw/Pocahontas dichotomy in the flesh. An avid reader who often inserted quotations from his favorite poems and novels into his diary, he confessed that his encounters with western Indians did not meet the expectations he'd garnered from popular books. "They are a different species from our New England Indians," he decided. Indeed, his descriptions, like many other western migrants, more nearly mirror those of African-Americans than American Indians, emphasizing their dark skin, broad features, and coarse hair. As for their women, Timothy reported that "those who are supposed to know [say] that Indian women, like the beasts of the field, have their certain times for seeking the man." In his experience, he admitted, he had seen Indian girls who, when "'in heat,' would fondle around you and in every possible way would ask you to relieve them." On the other hand, he wrote that he had "seen many Indian girls whose person I have coveted but whose modest appearance forbade me ever attempting to do anything wrong."[103] As will be corroborated by other reports analyzed in Chapter Four, American men seem to have felt more conflicted about Indian women's sexuality than about that of black women. Within the racial spectrum, Indian women were placed slightly higher than the latter, and therefore their associated sexuality was more complicated. In this way, white men could write about Indian women in very similar ways to black women, speaking of their "lustfulness," their polygamy, their "fruitefulness," and their quick, easy births, and yet more openly express their desire and admiration for even pure-blooded tribeswomen.[104]

In the romantic literature, an Indian woman's desirability was partly based on the ownership of her body, as with black women. Many stories indulged this fantasy of ownership by presenting the Indian woman as a purchasable, tradable commodity. It was well-known that Indian women in the West were given to Indian men (as well as white trappers and traders) in exchange for a certain number of pelts, blankets, horses, or other valuable commodities. While such a trade was viewed by Indian society as a way of cementing kin networks and trade relationships, and a woman could leave or divorce her husband if she desired, white society viewed such a practice as a form of pseudo-slavery. In one fictionalized diary account, the purchase of wives was seen as a fine joke. When a group of white, male travelers stayed in an Indian camp for a few days, a number of tribesmen became enamored of their musical instruments and suggested they be traded for Indian wives. "Brothers, do strike the bargain!" one of the musicians' companions yelled, "It's a capital joke. I will save your instruments at all events." The "marriage" was then accomplished with a simple exchange of hands, and the Indian women "gave themselves up without any resistance to their supposed intended husbands, allowing themselves to be embraced and kissed by them to mutual satisfaction." Such ease would certainly have been valued in an American society all too burdened with the financial, legal, and ceremonial complexities of marriage.[105]

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[103] October 20, 1850, Timothy C. Osborn Journal; August 8, 1850, Ibid.

[104] For examples of early writings speaking of Indian women in the same way as African women, see Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 16—30. The specific quotes listed are from *A Treatyse of the Newe India by Sebastian Münster* (1553), trans. Richard Eden (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1966), 57.

[105] Professor WM. Beschke, *The Dreadful Sufferings and Thrilling Adventures of an Overland Party of Emigrants to California: Their Terrible conflicts! With Savage Tribes of Indians!! And Mexican Bands of Robbers!!! With Marriage, Funeral, and Other Interesting Ceremonies and Customs of Indian Life in the Far West. Compiled from the Journal of Mr. George Adam, one of the Adventurers* (St Louis, MO: Barclay and Co., 1850), 32—37. More on Indian marriage practices will be detailed in Chapter Four.

This desire for ownership became even more provocative when combined with the fantasy of polygamy. The fact that polygamous marriages were prevalent with Indians in all time periods and regions made them a very popular theme in romantic literature. Furthermore, the well-known fact that frontiersmen like the famed Kit Carson had multiple Indian wives made the prospect all the more alluring. Since Indian marriages were not sanctioned by the church, they were not legally binding in American society. Not only could white American men therefore have as many Indian wives as they wished, but they could also legally pursue a legitimate marriage with a white woman. Such a plot-line is very common in western literature, echoing that of the black concubine/white wife in southern literature.

Finally, the fantasy of ownership was further developed by incorporating an aspect of the Pocahontas myth: exceptional devotion to white men. In almost every romance, Indian women betrayed their own societies, spurned Indian lovers, and even sacrificed themselves for their love of a white man. Desirability, therefore, was based on the belief that a white man could essentially own an Indian woman's body *and* soul. Purchase was an option in the way it never could be for white women, but it was also believed to be unnecessary; in the literature, Indian women almost always gave themselves fully and willingly to white men. The novel *Rebels and Tories* described this classic theme of Indian women's all-consuming love for white men by claiming that the Princess Na-she-ma

> found [the white man's] song sweeter than the voices of spring birds; and like a thirsty doe, panting for the cooling waters of the lake, her ear drank in the warbling fondness of his tongue, till her own heart went away captive to the stranger, and peace no longer dwelt in the red chief's wigwam, and the sight of her own braves pleased no more.[106]

Like quadroons, Indian women were almost always granted genteel blood—in this case, a royal Indian parent—permitting the realization of aristocratic fantasies, as well. Unlike literature's quadroons, however, Indian women were more often described as childlike, innocent "maidens," or "children of the forest."[107] While they were also described in sexual terms, Indian women's sensuality appears to have lain more in their wildness and the opportunity they presented to white men of a retreat from societal restrictions into the liberating arms of Nature. While many Indian women were described as mixed-race, the literature was therefore more accepting of full-blooded Indians as long as they were princesses (like Pocahontas) and fully removed from European or American society.

The women who received the most open admiration among American men, however, were Spanish American. Whether in diaries, travelogues, novels, articles, or political discourses, Americans seemed particularly confused about the place of Spanish American people within the racial spectrum. A number claimed to be fully white, descended in pure lines from the Spanish conquistadors. Even so, as will be seen in Chapter Six, many North Americans considered Spanish, or "Mediterranean," blood inferior to Anglo-Saxon, as it was thought to be tainted with "Moorish" influences. Other Spanish Americans were every gradation of skin color imaginable, the result of centuries of intermingling among Indians, Europeans, and Africans. Spanish American society was not—indeed, simply *could* not—be constructed along the lines of the

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[106] Lawrence Labree, *Rebels and Tories, or, The Blood of the Mohawk! A Tale of the American Revolution* (New York: DeWitt and Davenport, 1851) 13.

[107] Specific examples of books mentioning these oft-repeated terms will be analyzed in Chapters Four and Five.

racial binary that so rigidly existed in the United States. To make matters more complicated, society in nations like Mexico had a relatively fluid caste system, allowing degrees of social mobility that were virtually impossible in the United States. Of course, whiteness was certainly prized and consistently placed at the top of the social hierarchy, and strict racism did ensure that a number of European, primarily elite families carefully preserved their biological, "true" whiteness. Nonetheless, Mexicans of almost any racial designation could still "whiten" in a number of ways denied non-whites in the United States: by obtaining official *gracias al sacar* sanctions that wiped "tainted" blood from genealogies and "proved" white descent; by improving their socioeconomic standing and obtaining titles like "Don;" or by moving to the northern frontier to claim racial superiority as a "bastion of civilization" against the "wild" Indians that still posed a threat in those regions.[108] For this reason, though North Americans agreed that Spanish Americans were a "mongrel" race, they were often confronted with the latter's adamant insistence on whiteness. Where such a mix of varying races, nationalities, and associated character traits fit between the poles of America's simplistic racial spectrum was perplexing.[109]

As a result, Americans lumped together a number of racial stereotypes pertaining to blacks, Indians, and Spaniards and insisted that these constituted the Spanish American persona. Almost all American visitors attempted to link various features, traits, and customs to the "blood" of one or another parent race, resulting in a cacophony of racial stereotypes. In one of his highly influential lectures in the 1830s, Scottish intellectual Alexander Kinmont held that there was a psychological connection between Spanish Americans and Negroes.[110] Others held that apparent Spanish American submissiveness and inability to govern themselves (seen as an excuse for an American takeover) was a result of the blood of a conquered race, the Aztecs.[111] Still more suggested that their perceived passionate natures resulted from the addition of Spanish blood, itself containing the admixture of "Moorish" blood and therefore "tainted" in American eyes.[112] It was, however, generally agreed that the mongrel Spanish American was, as popular

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[108] These subjects will be further detailed in Chapter Six. For more on *gracias al sacar* petitions, see María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Ann Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, Sexuality, and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). For more on the possibility of "whitening" by improving one's social position and becoming politically or economically successful, see Patricia Seed, "The Social Dimensions of Race: Mexico City, 1753," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 62, no. 4 (November 1982): 569—606; For more on the "whitening" that occurred on the frontier, where "white" was defined as "not Indian," see Ana María Alonso, *Thread of Blood: Colonialism, Revolution, and Gender on Mexico's Northern Frontier* (Tuscon: The University of Arizona Press, 1997).

[109] One of the most comprehensive accounts of American political, social, and cultural attitudes toward Spanish Americans can be found in Pike, *The United States and Latin America*.

[110] Alexander Kinmont, *Twelve Lectures on the Natural History of Man and the Rise of Progress and Philosophy* (Cincinnati: U.P. James, 1839), 289—290. The lecture will be further quoted in Chapter Six.

[111] In his exceptionally popular book, *The History of the Conquest of Mexico*, William Hickling Prescott wrote that "in th[e] faltering step, and meek and melancholy aspect [of the Mexican Indians], we read the sad characters of the conquered race." William Hickling Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico, With a Preliminary View of the Ancient Mexican Civilization, and the Life of the Conqueror, Hernando Cortez* (London: Richard Bentley, 1843), 27. It is also important to note that America's perception of Spanish Americans' "submissiveness" and political ineptitude was informed both by the "Black Legend," which held that Spain had been a tyrannical, oppressive colonial force, and by the results of the Mexican War of Independence. Although the conflict had ended in 1821, political upheaval and violence continued for decades. See Pike, *The United States and Latin America*.

[112] For example, William Watts Hart Davis, a travel writer and U.S. Attorney for New Mexico, explained the negative results of the admixture of "Moorish" blood in Spanish American peoples in *El Gringo: or, New Mexico*

writer Francis Parkman wrote, "by no means" white, lacking what William Watts Hart Davis called "the stability of character and soundness of intellect that give such vast superiority to the Anglo-Saxon race over every other people."[113]

Nonetheless, nineteenth-century Americans had a particular interest in Spanish American people: imperial designs. Although the Indians had their own "nations" in the West, neither they nor the African race were thought capable of constructing actual, civilized nation-states.[114] North Americans refused to consider Spanish American nations perfectly "civilized," but they did evidence a political, economic, and cultural structure that appeared more cohesive and centralized than that of Indians or Africans. More importantly, they were in possession of vast tracts of lands temptingly bordering America. For this reason, much of the literature on Spanish American peoples was more open to the idea of racial mixing and more blunt about the possibility of sexual relations or marriage with Spanish American women. Unlike works on Indians or Africans, white Americans did not have an extensive literature about encounters with Spanish American peoples until the nineteenth century, when the ideology of "manifest destiny" and new, imperialist designs began to make the annexation of various southern nations a distinct possibility. When such expansion was described, it was very often in terms that connoted sexual union.

Like black and Indian women, Mexican women were portrayed as naturally passionate, lustful, and exceedingly desirous of white men. They were reported to have the same love of flashy colors and ostentatious finery as the other non-white races, similar habits like smoking and dancing, and a similar tendency to abandon men of their own race and even their nation itself to pursue white men. Furthermore, like Indian, African, and slave societies, Spanish Americans were reported to be notoriously careless of marriage, often dispensing with it altogether to engage in common-law unions, or blatantly engaging in adultery. Historian Frederick Pike has argued that the same rationale that white American men used to sexually exploit African-American women was used to pursue Spanish American women. Interracial sex was excused by casting Mexican women as the aggressors.[115] Furthermore, while descriptions of their fecundity did not approach the hugely exaggerated accounts of Indian and African women's plentiful, sporadic, painless births, Spanish American women were nonetheless thought to be quite careless of their children's parentage.[116]

The literature on Spanish American women focused not so much on the ownership of the female body as that of the *lands* connected to her dowry. Imperialist designs, therefore, were prevalent even in the romantic literature, especially as this genre became prevalent after the triumph of the Mexican-American War. While Indian and quadroon women were often tragic figures in the literature because they were rarely able to marry their white lovers or enter white

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and Her People (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1857), 214—215. This work will be further quoted in Chapter Six.

[113] Francis Parkman quoted in Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood,* 94; Davis, *El Gringo,* 217.

[114] These ideas were widely discussed in political, scholarly, and popular literature. One of the most comprehensive analyses of the histories, civilizations, and capabilities of each race was Josiah Nott and George Gliddon, *Types of Mankind: or Ethnological Researches, Based Upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures and Crania of Races, and Upon Their Natural, Geographical, Philological and Biblical History*, 6th edition (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co, 1854).

[115] Pike, *The United States and Latin America*, 10—13.

[116] Further descriptions of the perceived habits of Spanish Americans—and the reality that lay behind certain traditions like marriage and the baptism of illegitimate children—will be further evidenced in Chapter Six.

society, Spanish American women were very often granted the happy ending of a legitimate marriage. The option of a common-law marriage did exist, but only a legitimate, church-sanctioned marriage could ensure the transfer of the wife's property and wealth to her white husband. For this reason, the literature waxed almost as eloquent about Spanish America's lands as its women, often utilizing similar adjectives: beautiful, fertile, lush and opulent. Almost every Spanish American woman in the literature was, true to the aristocratic fantasy that characterized other interracial plots, descended of noble blood—either Spanish aristocracy or Aztec royalty. Furthermore, almost every story with a Spanish American heroine introduced the reader to her family's gorgeous mansion and vast tracts of fertile land. The women themselves were actually very rarely presented as purely white; usually, they possessed a combination of Indian, black, and Spanish traits. As these three races had long been established in the literary canon, newer literature that featured Spanish American women therefore borrowed from these existing types.

Finally, perhaps because, in fiction, a Spanish American heroine's aristocratic blood held social value, her religious upbringing had sanctioned her virtue, and her dowry and property were so desirable, she was rarely confronted with white, female competition. In fact, a significant number of Spanish American women were taken home to the United States at the close of their stories to be proudly presented to white families and integrated into American society. Obviously, the whitening process of miscegenation was prevalent in literature, too—at least, if the two races were considered relative social equals, and if marriage meant significant pecuniary and territorial gains.[117]

Ironically, if non-white women of every variety were all perceived to share the same passionate, lascivious qualities that made them the antithesis of white womanhood, non-white men were almost always described as effeminate. Such a perception allowed white men to ignore them as a threat in the former's pursuit of non-white women, and to downplay the potential for the opposite occurrence of sexual relations between white women and non-white men. Lydia Maria Child wrote that

> The comparison between women and the colored races is striking. Both are characterized by affection more than by intellect; both have a strong development of the religious sentiment; both are exceedingly adhesive in their attachments; both, comparatively speaking, have a tendency to submission; and hence, both have been kept in subjection by physical force, and considered rather in the light of property, than as individuals.[118]

Child's comments were meant to be flattering to the black race, portraying them as human rather than bestial and insisting that they possessed the very traits that were so admired in women. Nonetheless, the effects of ideas like Child's were to emphasize the masculine superiority of the white race over the weaker, effeminate races, and to indirectly condone racial oppression and sexual aggression.

The weakness and effeminacy of blacks, Indians, and Spanish Americans appeared to be proven by societal constructs and cultural traditions. Black slaves, of course, were denied legal marriages. Male slaves had no claim over their women whatsoever: their wives could be raped, sold, or killed before their eyes. Indian men were reported to prostitute their own women, and, though polygamists, were often described as having little sexual drive. This perception was in

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[117] The patterns in literature focusing on Spanish American *señoritas* will be further analyzed in Chapter Seven.
[118] Lydia Maria Child, "The African Race," *National Anti-Slavery Standard,* April 27, 1843, 187.

part a result of white men's perception of Indian social structures, wherein the men hunted and the women worked in the field and tended to domestic and village duties. Such a system appeared to confirm Indian men's laziness and Indian women's slave status. In his famous work on the various races of mankind, Count Buffon wrote that Indian men's penises were "small and feeble," and that they had "no ardour for women" or propensity for "lively" and "tender" attachments, since "they regard their females as servants destined to labour, or as beasts of burden."[119] Spanish American men were similarly seen as slothful and unable to fulfill their women's sexual desires, a result attributed to their degraded bloodlines, the remnants of Spanish aristocratic institutions, and the corruption of Catholicism. The *Southern Quarterly Review* pronounced Mexican men flighty "butterflies," who "flirt a little, intrigue a little, gamble a little, fight fowls a little, and ride a little on a little horse that moves along at a little mincing pace." They were the ineffective rulers of a "drowsy realm of inactivity," ruled over by priests and soldiers who "oppress[ed] the bosom of the beautiful land and crush[ed] its vitals by the weight of mingled superstition and despotism."[120] Such a description is blatantly sexual, suggesting that an infusion of good, strong, Anglo-Saxon American blood could revive the "bosom" of the country by paying attention to those of its countrywomen.

That non-white men posed no threat and that non-white women very obviously preferred white men was explained in biological as well as social terms. It was natural, scientists and racial theorists explained, that women would prefer men of the stronger, more virile, intelligent, and altogether superior race. The *Southern Quarterly Review*, for example, explained that Californian *señorita*s, "as [the women] of all other countries, preferr[ed] brave men," and "therefore did not permit a moment's rivalry between the races. The Anglo-Saxon, or Norman races were inevitably preferred."[121] Indeed, as the next section will show, white men's very sperm were thought to be stronger than those of non-white men. For this reason, miscegenation between white men and non-white women could be viewed as ameliorative for the inferior race, creating children that slowly advanced up the rungs of the hierarchical racial spectrum.

"The inferior varietals of the human race . . . are giving way as the Caucasians advance"[122]

"Gendering" Miscegenation

Fertilization was not fully understood until 1876, when Oskar Hertwig used advances in microscopy to show how the sperm penetrated the egg. In the antebellum period, scientists were divided on a variety of theories: they knew that sperm and egg existed, but they did not know how actual conception took place, nor of the existence of DNA. One major theory held that the future baby was contained—in tiny, folded form—in the head of the sperm, and that the egg simply served as a kind of food basket. An opposing theory suggested that the folded human existed in stasis within the egg, and that the sperm somehow came and stirred it into life. Both

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[119] Count Buffon quoted in Michèle Duchet, *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des lumières* (Paris: Francois Maspero, 1971), 229-80.
[120] *Southern Quarterly Review*, October 1847, 371.
[121] "The Conquest of California, and the Case of Lieutenant Col. Fremont," *Southern Quarterly Review*, July 1849, 420.
[122] Hollick, *An Inquiry into the Rights*, 12.

theories therefore rested on the notion that the male sperm contained the energizing life force: the egg was either simply a nest or a food trough.[123]

Such notions of superior male agency in fertilization translated into theories about racial mixing. It was supposed that the race of the male had a greater impact on the offspring resulting from an interracial union. In their influential work *Types of Mankind,* scholars Josiah Nott, George Gliddon, and Samuel Morton wrote that not only did children of interracial unions tend to resemble their father's race, but the father's "blood" could sometimes remain in the female body to influence future children.[124] Examples were given of black women who had borne multiple mulatto children by white men, and who then, after taking on a new, black partner, continued to produce markedly white children. Indeed, the authors of *Types of Mankind* suggested that repeated intercourse strengthened the father's racial influence over his child. They described the case of "an English gentleman in the West Indies, who had a large family by a Negro woman, and where the children exhibited successively, more and more, the European features and complexion."[125]

This, of course, translated perfectly into the prevailing sexual and racial ideology. If a man's white blood was more powerful than a non-white woman's, thus leaving a greater imprint on the offspring, it could also be inferred that a white man's sperm was more powerful than that of a non-white man. *Types of Mankind* immediately made this connection, asserting that there was extensive proof of native Australian women who, after birthing children by European men, "los[e] the power of conception, on a renewal of intercourse, with a male of [their] own race, retaining only that of procreating with the write men." Hundreds of such instances were cited among "the Hurons, Seminoles, Red Indiens, Yakies, Mendosa Indians, Auracos, South Sea Islanders, and natives of New Zealand, New South Wales, and Van Diemen's Land." This, the authors asserted, was the way Nature ensured that the strongest race prevailed.[126]

Such medical "proof" bolstered the popular belief in the antebellum period that the inferior races were dying out. This could apparently be noted in the gradual extinction of the Indians, low fertility among certain slave communities, and the ease with which certain African and Indian races were thought to have been conquered. Such a belief was integral to the notion of "manifest destiny," which placed the Anglo-Saxon male at the head of a conquering racial wave that would sweep over the North American continent and subject it to superior, white rule. "That the inferior varieties of the human race will only endure for a limited period is being proved by the indisputable fact that they are continually dwindling away," the popular medical writer Frederick Hollick asserted. "[They] are giving way as the Caucasians advance."[127] Even if the horrific possibility of sexual union between non-white men and white women occurred, many writers asserted that it could never be fruitful. Many antebellum people ascribed to the idea of polygenism, which held that different races were, in fact, different *species,* sprung from totally

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[123] Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990) 172, 173, 174.

[124] People in the antebellum period no longer believed that fertilization involved a mixing of "blood," but they persisted in using the word to connote whatever mysterious, generative force established human traits. Professor Thomas Laqueur, interview with the author, University of California, Berkeley, Department of History, October 8th, 2011.

[125] Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind,* 396.

[126] Ibid., 396.

[127] Hollick, *An Inquiry into the Rights,* 12. For the primary historical piece on the racial ideology of Anglo-Saxonism, see: Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny.*

different lineages. While the idea was theologically delicate, since it negated the story of Adam and Eve, it nonetheless held significant popular sway. In his work on human hybridity, the French physician Paul Broca insisted that the human races were so very different that crossed unions often resulted in unhealthy, infertile offspring—just like the mules produced by horses and donkeys. Interestingly, however, Broca's theory still left room for the notion of the superiority of white male sperm. He wrote that while the union of a black man and white woman was very frequently sterile, that of a white man and black woman was as productive as a marriage with any other race.[128]

Such an ideology therefore suggested that amalgamation was not necessarily a bad thing, as long as it occurred between white men and black women. In fact, it could even be seen as part and parcel of the advance of the Caucasian race and the disappearance of the inferior varietals, especially if, as *Types of Mankind* insisted, continued miscegenation created whiter and whiter children. The legal system buttressed this interrelated racism and sexism: interracial sex between white men and non-white women was rarely penalized in court, though the opposite occurrence (non-white men and white women) was considered a dire occurrence and was harshly punished.[129] In this way, the law both buttressed white male hegemony and condoned miscegenation through the female line.

Mixed-race people, then, held a complicated place in American society. Shunned in respectable white society, they were nonetheless increasingly numerous in the antebellum period. The racial binary that kept them in an inferior position to whites nonetheless could still not fully castigate them as "black," "Indian," or any other full-blooded race. While they were granted a number of "white" traits, almost all accounts—whether public or private, political, scientific, or literary—agreed that though these were expressed agreeably in mixed-race women, they were perverted and degraded in mixed-race men.

The reasons for these depictions are rooted in the antebellum metalanguage of race, which associated various character traits with skin color. As previously described, non-white characteristics were most often described as effeminate. The descriptions of these characteristics reached their height in a movement historian George Frederickson calls "romantic racialism," popularized primarily among abolitionists.[130] Lydia Maria Child's comments about the natural submissiveness of the "colored races," as well as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* fit into this ideology. According to romantic racialists, the "colored races," especially the Negro, contained certain traits that, while intellectually weaker than those of the Anglo-Saxon race, were also highly laudable. These included, as various intellectuals and ministers wrote, "a strong religious tendency, and that strength of attachment which is capable of any kind of self-denial and self-sacrifice," a "willingness to serve," "gentle[ness," and "humb[le] but truly . . . noble qualities which teach [them] to obey."[131] Nonetheless, while these qualities fit snugly within the

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[128] Paul Broca, *On the Phenomena of Hybridity in the Genus Homo* (London: Longman, Green, Longman & Roberts, 1864) 25—35. For more analyses of the polygenist theory, see: George Stocking, Jr, *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (The Free Press: New York, 1968); Frederickson, *Racism.*

[129] For more on miscegenation law, which will be further detailed in Chapter Eight, see Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*.

[130] George Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817—1914* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1971), 104—110.

[131] Kinmont, *Twelve Lectures,* 188-193, 198, 218; James Freeman Clarke, *Slavery in the United States: A Sermon Delivered on Thanksgiving Day, 1842* (Boston, 1843), 24; James Russell Lowell, *Anti-Slavery Papers,* Boston and New York, 1902), 1: 21—22.

"cult of true womanhood," they were in stark contrast to much of the period's forms of masculinity. A mixed-race person's retention of the "dark" qualities of submissiveness, piety, weakness and obedience would therefore have appeared attractive in a female but inferior or revolting in a male.[132]

Similarly, any perceived "white" qualities were viewed as attractive and ameliorative in the female, but threatening in a male. The "white" traits of intelligence, courage, and love of liberty were seen to be perverted in mixed-race males, resulting in low cunning, dishonesty, deception, and criminality. Mixed-race Indians were often blamed for deceit and betrayal, often occupying a societal position committed neither to Indian nor to white society, and thus loyal to neither. Mixed-race Mexicans were also described as loathsome "half-breeds," occupying similar, liminal societal positions as bandits. Mixed-race blacks were seen to be particularly dangerous slaves, prone to stirring up rebellion because of a misguided sense of entitlement to white rights. The cunning, intelligence, and superiority complex that were expressed in their white blood made them a threat to their masters. While mixed-race slave men were three times more likely to be assigned to skilled, "white" work like carpentry or blacksmithing, slave traders often found it difficult to sell them. One light-skinned slave recalled that he had spent months in the New Orleans slave market before being sold, saying that he was "too white" and that buyers "were afraid I could read and write and would never serve as a slave but run away."[133] Light-skinned mulattos were particularly mistrusted because of their attempts to "pass" in white society. This not only permitted escape, but raised the frightening specter of black men hiding in white society, able to attack white men and pursue white women.[134]

A mixed-race woman, on the other hand, was very often admired. With whiter skin and smoother hair, she conformed more readily to white standards of beauty. Furthermore, her perceived "white" qualities of delicacy, domestic abilities, and intelligence made her more attractive and respectable—and therefore more sexually desirable—in white men's eyes. Such views on mixed-race women are most obvious in white men's organization of the slave market. As historian Walter Johnson has shown, a word that persistently recurred in slaveholders' descriptions of light-skinned slaves was "delicate," since "all of their race science and all of their superstition made slaveholders suspect that the whiteness in their female slaves made them ill-

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[132] One possible contradiction of this statement can be found in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* in which Tom's virtue lies in the fact that he *does* possess the so-called "feminine" virtues of piety and obedience. Yet Stowe was not suggesting that Tom was a paragon of masculinity. Rather, he was supposed to embody the black race's perceived "best" qualities—which, as Lydia Maria Child wrote, were very similar to feminine virtues. Stowe's true paragon of masculinity is George, the strong, heroic, handsome mulatto. While Tom certainly is not perceived to be revolting, he is clearly inferior.

[133] Henry Bibb, *Narrative of Henry Bibb: an American Slave* (1849) quoted in Johnson, *Soul by Soul,* 151.

[134] As the focus of this dissertation will be on mixed-race women, mixed-race men will not be studied as closely. For more on secondary source analyses of perceptions of mixed-race Indian, Spanish American, and black men in white, American society, see: Thomas N. Ingersoll, *To Intermix with Our White Brothers: Indian Mixed Bloods in the United States from Earliest Times to the Indian Removal* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005); Claudio Santo, *Black, White, and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Betsy Ekkila, *Mixed Blood and Other Crosses: Rethinking American Literature from the Revolution to the Culture Wars* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Harry J. Brown, *Injun Joe's Ghost: The Indian Mixed-Blood in American Writing* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press); Penelope Bullock, Penelope Bullock, "The Mulatto in American Fiction," *Phylon* 6, no. 1 (1st Qtr., 1945): 78-82; Nancy Bentley, "White Slaves: The Mulatto Hero in Antebellum Fiction," *American Literature* 65, no. 3, (Sep., 1993): 501-522; Johnson, *Soul by Soul*; Pike, *The United States and Latin America*; Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood* (2005).

suited for the daily rigors they demanded of dark-skinned women." For this reason, mixed-race women were almost always chosen for domestic work. One slave, Mary Ellen Brooks, whose traders described her as "delicate," "intelligent," "well-suited for a house servant," "fancy," and "a mulatto," was allowed a sleeping mattress while in the slave market, a practice traders explained was "usual with house servants."[135] Even more tellingly, the "fancy girl" sex trade examined in Chapter Two limited itself entirely to the sale of mixed-race women who were supposed to possess the various "white" traits of beauty, delicacy, domesticity, and intelligence. The value American society placed on the expression of these "white" traits in mixed-race women was demonstrated in the exceptionally high prices paid for "fancy girls," which were far and away the highest in the slave market.

The admirable qualities of mixed-race women were very often remarked upon in Indian and Mexican as well as black women, making them the most frequent protagonists of romantic literature about interracial unions. In his journeys around Spanish America, American travelogue writer Henry Augustus Wise admitted

> I know not how or why, but there certainly is an irresistible charm, that floats like a mist around Spanish creoles; indeed, creoles of all nations have a style of fascination peculiarly their own, which renders them truly bewitching, with the power of retaining their spells as long, and as strong as any. Not that their features are more beautiful, eyes brighter, or manners even as refined as those in older countries, for they are not; but still they have soft languishing eyes, rich dark hair, and pliant graceful forms, combined with the greatest possible charm in woman, earnest unaffected, and amiable dispositions.[136]

Such a description is very telling of these women's particular place within the racial spectrum: not as "refined as those in older countries," but with a beauty and sexuality that was "languishing," "rich," and "pliant."

According to these beliefs about the gendered nature of miscegenation, mixed-race women were not only exceptionally alluring, uniting, as one author claimed, "the desirable points of character in both races," but amalgamation via white male blood could be viewed as a whitening process.[137] Antebellum fiction toyed with this idea by providing surprising numbers of happy endings with mixed-race marriages and admirable, white offspring. Perhaps more obviously, however, this fiction was distinguished by a recurring racial theme: the juxtaposition of perceived "dark" and "light," white and non-white characteristics in the form of two, competing heroines. Such an association of "darkness" with certain passionate, sometimes evil feminine qualities was, of course, a centuries-old literary trope. However, the juxtaposition of a dark, *desirable* character with a fair, insipid character, and the very obvious preference of the author for the former—even if he or she granted victory to the latter—was a particularly popular plotline in antebellum America.[138] It is my belief that this juxtaposition enabled white American society, and particularly white men, to evaluate the "crisis of femininity" in literary form,

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[135] Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 154.
[136] Henry Augustus Wise, *Los Gringos: Or an Inside View of Mexico and California, with Wanderings in Peru, Chile, and Polynesia* (London: Richard Bentley, 1849), 29.
[137] Timothy Flint, *Francis Berrian: or, the Mexican Patriot* (Boston: Cummings, Hilliard, and Company, 1826), 2: 266.
[138] Lois Banner, *American Beauty*, 11.

vicariously living through the white male characters who had to choose between the two women. Such a choice, and such an obvious preference for the "dark" lady over the "light," reflected the same conflict that was occurring in American society at large.

"[Her courage] gave yet a deeper colour of carnation to her complexion, and yet more brilliant fire to her eye."[139]

The "Dark Lady" in Antebellum Fiction

A significant portion of the literature examined in the following chapters utilized this plotline by juxtaposing an Indian, Spanish American, or black woman (all usually mixed-race) with a white woman. Usually, the two were presented as half-sisters, cousins, or friends who were both in love with the same man—an implicit theme that spoke to the prevalence of miscegenation in American society. Interestingly, the two women were very rarely enemies; indeed, the darker woman almost always loved, admired, and wished to protect her fair friend. Darkness, therefore, was not always associated with evil, as in the biblical tradition. Furthermore, it was not solely associated with sensuality, passion, and ardor, for the fictional accounts of dark women were far more complex than those of travelogues or diaries, which often dismissed non-white women as desirable but decidedly inferior in terms of adherence to the "cult of true womanhood." The most provocative aspect of this genre of antebellum fiction is that it almost invariably portrayed the dark woman as older, wiser, braver, and more heroic than her fair companion. It was the dark woman who, in various stories, risked her life for her white lover, carried daggers, stilettos, and pistols, boldly fought villains, bravely defended her virtue, and even cross-dressed. The fairer woman, by contrast, was almost always sweet, pure, and virtuous, but weak, insipid, and undeniably boring.

Such a contrast often had such an impact on readers that, if the fair lady ended up winning the love of the white man, or if the dark lady met a tragic end, the author was subjected to angry reviews. James Fenimore Cooper, for example, encountered numerous protests from fans when he killed off Cora, the remarkable quadroon heroine who so captivated readers. Many expressed great disappointment that he had allowed Alice, Cora's childlike, pale, perpetually fainting sister, to achieve the happy ending of rescue and marriage instead. Cooper's *Leathertocking Tales* were extremely popular in the antebellum period, cited not only by numerous authors attempting to copy his style of so-called "frontier literature," but also by travelers who eagerly sought Cooper's variety of "noble savage" among the western Indians. Indeed, as popular literature increasingly turned to the West for a romantic setting, Cooper's "noble savage" and brave, mixed-race frontierswoman became stock characters.[140]

Yet literary scholars agree that the novels with the greatest impact on antebellum American western fiction—and, indeed, on the period's romantic fiction in general—were Sir Walter Scott's *Waverly* series, especially *Ivanhoe*.[141] References appear again and again in Gold Rush diaries and especially in soldiers' accounts of the Mexican-American War. In his analysis of the literature surrounding that conflict, Historian Robert Johannsen noted that soldiers continually compared Mexico, the legend of the Aztec conquest, and their own military ventures

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[139] Sir Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe: A Romance* (1819; repr., London: Whittaker & Co., 1830), 2: 16.
[140] LeMire, *Miscegenation*, 35-52.
[141] The *Waverly* series was published from 1814 to 1831, with *Ivanhoe* published in 1820. They therefore pre-date the vast majority of all the other books mentioned in this dissertation, validating the distinct possibility—when not explicitly stated by authors themselves—that the later, American works were inspired by Scott.

to Scott's romances. One soldier mused dreamily that some of the scenes he saw "reminded me of those described by Scott, . . . the ruined white walls of a Hacienda at a distance having a striking resemblance to the Feudal Castle of some bold Baron. . I would not have been in the least surprised to have seen [a horseman] draw up and challenge one of our number to break a lance in honor of "fayre ladye" and chivalry.[142] Historian Lois Banner, furthermore, contends that it was *Ivanhoe* that first introduced the trend of "splitting the female personality into two characters, one "dark and sensuous" and one "blonde and virtuous."[143] It is therefore possible that Scott's women—the dark Jewess Rebecca and the fair Saxon Rowena—greatly influenced the juxtaposed heroines of later, American fiction. As will be evidenced in the ensuing chapters, the dark and fair ladies of American literature very often displayed markedly similar physical, mental, and character traits to Rebecca and Rowena. An analysis of Scott's work is therefore useful as a prototype.

Scott's dark Jewess, Rebecca, is very obviously the author's—and, by extension, the reader's—favorite female character, despite the racial impurity Scott almost obsessively reiterates. When the reader first meets her, attention is immediately directed to her sensuality. Her form is described as "exquisitely symmetrical," "shewn to advantage" by an exotic, "Eastern" costume of "the richest Persian silk" that, due to the day's heat, was partially unbuttoned. This, Scott suggestively writes, "something enlarged the prospect to which we allude"—meaning her magnificent bosom. He enthuses about the "darkness of her complexion," the "brilliancy of her eyes, the superb arch of her eyebrows," and "the profusion of her sable tresses" that cascaded over "a lovely neck and bosom."[144] Despite her sexualized portrayal, no doubt is ever cast on Rebecca's virtue. Indeed, her generosity, intelligence, and kindness are continually emphasized in various short scenes in which she cares for Jew and Gentile, nobleman and commoner alike.

Her spotless purity and remarkable bravery are displayed to their fullest effect when she is captured by the Norman villain, Brian de Bois Guilbert. When the corrupt Templar knight appears in her prison chamber to announce his intentions of making her his paramour, a station to which he obviously feels that she, being an inferior Jewess, would immediately agree, she boldly refuses him. Shocked into rage, the Templar announces his right of ownership to her body. I am, he says, "a conqueror. Thou art the captive of my bow and spear—subject to my will by the laws of all nations; nor will I abate an inch of my right, or abstain from taking by violence what thou refusest to entreaty or necessity" Such language echoes that of Doctor Norcum about his slave, Harriet Jacobs. A medieval setting could therefore also provide the fantasy of ownership of a racialized female body. Rather than submit to a fate as his sex slave, however, Rebecca becomes even more desperately defiant. Declaring "I spit at thee and I defy thee!" she throws open the lattice window and stands on the edge, declaring that if the Templar comes a step nearer she will throw herself out, where her body "shall be crushed out of the very form of humanity upon the stones of that courtyard, ere it become the victim of thy brutality!" Such heroics so awe the Templar that he not only agrees never to do her harm, but falls even more deeply in love with her. Scott invites the reader to share in this profound admiration, going to great lengths to describe the magnificence of her passion. He writes that her determination, as well as her phenomenal beauty, "gave to her looks, air, and manner, a dignity that seemed more

[142] Samuel Chamberlain, *My Confession* , quoted in Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas*, 83.
[143] Banner, *American Beauty*, 11.
[144] Scott, *Ivanhoe*, 1:111.

than mortal." Indeed, her passion—itself the result of her "colored" race—is described as *physically* coloring her: "her cheek blanched not," and her resolve "gave yet a deeper colour of carnation to her complexion, and yet more brilliant fire to her eye." The Templar, Scott proclaims—and it is obvious that he includes himself and the reader in this statement—thought he "had never beheld beauty so animated and so commanding."[145]

This certainly establishes Rebecca as *Ivanhoe*'s most fascinating beauty, since its only other representative, the Saxon Lady Rowena, is rather pathetic by comparison. She is "formed in the best proportions of her sex," though the eye is not invited to linger over her contours as it was over Rebecca's. Her complexion is "exquisitely fair" and her expression "noble," and Scott insists that she does not have "the insipidity which sometimes attaches to fair beauties." Nonetheless, while he acknowledges her ability to "command as well as to beseech," he explains that " mildness [is her] more natural expression." Rather than being dressed in an exotic costume of rich hues, with dark tresses falling luxuriously over her shoulders, Rowena's fair hair is arranged in ringlets under a veil that she pulls over her face as soon as she enters the room, thus denying the reader further voyeurism. Although ostensibly the head of her household, Rowena is described as rather spoiled and petulant, exercising "despotic authority" that contrasts starkly with Rebecca's selflessness and courageous determination.

The most obvious juxtaposition of Rowena and Rebecca's qualities, however, comes with the description of their shared kidnapping ordeal. Although Rowena at first appears righteously disdainful of her kidnapper, Walter De Bracy, Scott explains that this is because she hadn't believed his intentions. Her initial courage, then, is brushed aside as "fictitious," born of her expectation that all would "give way before her wishes," and "it deserted her when her eyes were opened to the extent of her own danger." While Rebecca, then, had leapt to the window ledge and proclaimed her willingness to die for her virtue, Rowena "quails" before her kidnapper, "casting her eyes around, as if to look for the aid which was nowhere to be found, and after a few broken interjections, . . . raised her hands to heaven, and burst into a passion of uncontrolled vexation and sorrow."[146] Rather than call for admiration of female beauty and passion, Scott presents some comic relief by describing her kidnapper as totally flummoxed, and quickly removes him—and the reader—from the scene with the distraction of a hunting horn at the castle gate. Scott excuses Rowena's rather pathetic conduct, which he blatantly contrasts with Rebecca's courage only five pages later, by explaining that the fair lady's "disposition was naturally that which physiognomists consider as proper to fair complexions, mild, timid, and gentle."[147] Here, then, is the scientific rationalization of racial conduct that lent itself to the literary development of insipid white women and passionate "dark ladies."

Both Rebecca and Rowena are in love with Wilfred of Ivanhoe, the noble, brave paragon of chivalry who lends his name to the title. Yet while Ivanhoe obviously shows his admiration for Rebecca while she is nursing him from his near-fatal wounds, he immediately withdraws his show of interest when he learns of her race. Scott invites the reader to be righteously indignant about this prejudice, describing Ivanhoe's attitude as painfully "cold" and yet insisting that "the gentleness and candour of Rebecca's nature imputed no fault to Ivanhoe for sharing in the universal prejudices of his age and religion." Though she knew Ivanhoe saw her "as one of a race of reprobation," she "ceased not to pay the patient the same devoted attention to his safety and

[145] Ibid., 2: 12, 14—16.
[146] Ibid., 1: 58, 59, 272, 344.
[147] Ibid, 1: 343.

convalescence."[148] Such a tragic scene suggests that the reader's preference for a different ending allowing interracial love would be merited. Indeed, the message could even be interpreted as disparaging the racism keeping interracial couples from happy endings. Scott was almost certainly not attempting to make any grand statement about interracial union in his novel, nor suggesting that various American races be substituted for Rebecca's Judaism. Nonetheless, the popularity of his novel made such fictional racial juxtapositions increasingly common.

Moreover, Scott established a precedent for a favored, "dark" heroine. His choice to end his novel with a marriage between Rowena and Ivanhoe, as well as Rebecca's removal to the Moorish Empire to live out her days as a kind of Jewish nun, created quite a negative reaction. Like Cooper's readers, Scott's fans wondered why the superior—albeit "colored"—woman was so "summarily and unnecessarily disposed of."[149] William Makepeace Thackeray went so far as to write a burlesque sequel to *Ivanhoe* that ended the way, he claimed, he and everyone else had hoped. "My dear Rebecca," he writes, "so admirable, so tender, so heroic, so beautiful," was so unjustly set aside for "that vapid, flaxen-headed" Rowena who, he declared, was "unworthy of Ivanhoe, and unworthy of her place as heroine." There was simply no way, Thackeray claimed, that readers could be expected to believe that Ivanhoe, "whose heart had been warmed in the company of the tender and beautiful Rebecca," could "sit down contented for life by the side of such a frigid piece of propriety as that icy, faultless, prim, niminy-piminy Rowena."[150] In his own hilarious sequel, *Rebecca and Rowena,* Ivanhoe suffers under Rowena's nagging, despotic rule for a few years before being handily "killed" in battle. Rowena marries again, and Ivanhoe, whose death was incorrectly reported, finds Rebecca (who has converted to Christianity) and marries her on the spot.

Clearly, then, audiences on both sides of the Atlantic professed certain racial preferences and yet practiced—or fantasized about—their total opposites. Fictional literature was the safe venue that allowed such fantasies to be played out and even given happy endings. The "dark lady" was given free rein to wear exotic clothing, expose her bosom suggestively, fall desperately in love with white men, betray her own people to secure her lover, give her body and soul to his keeping, jump out of windows, wield stilettos, shoot arrows and pistols, and have her eyes flash, her hair toss, and her complexion "color" and "darken" in sensual ways denied to, as Scott wrote, the "mild, timid, and gentle" dispositions of "fair complexions." The preference of Rebeccas over Rowenas could, in fictional literature, be freely acknowledged by characters, authors, and readers. In literature, characters could grandly profess, like the Spanish conquistador Cortes to his Aztec slave Malinche in Edward Maturin's very popular 1845 novel, *Montezuma: The Last of the Aztecs,* that "love regards not distinction of person or rank." Prudently set in a different time period and exotic location, and safely between the pages of a book, readers could spurn the prejudice that kept two lovers of different races apart, and agree with Maturin's Cortes that "where the heart is fixed, it over-leaps all difference of grade and blood; all those tyrannical barriers society hath established between the gentle-born and the base—between those who love, there is no distinction save in the degree of passion which unites them; . . . Love levels all."[151]

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[148] Ibid., 2: 82—83.
[149] Review of *The Last of the Mohicans,* by James Fenimore Cooper, *United States Literary Gazette,* May 1826, 87—94.
[150] William Makepeace Thackeray, *Rebecca and Rowena: A Romance Upon Romance* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1850), 4—5.
[151] Edward Maturin, *Montezuma, the Last of the Aztecs: A Romance, in Two Volumes* (New York: Paine & Burgess, 1845), 1: 175.

Indeed, such romantic drama was so alluring to antebellum audiences that Maturin's work was almost immediately turned into a play after its publication, allowing audiences to watch interracial drama in action. Pocahontas and John Smith, a love story that paralleled that of Malinche and Cortes, as well as several dramas featuring southern masters in love with their white quadroons, were also very popular theatrical topics in this period.[152] Of course, the desire to actually *see* such dramas suggests that society's interest was not solely, safely within the pages of books. The fact that literature was finding fault with "icy, faultless, prim, niminy-piminy" white women and desiring the "warmth" of darker races, and that such dramas were being brought to life on the stage, suggests that the same preference may have been playing out in society, too—far more than Americans were publicly willing to admit.

[152] Examples of these stage dramas include: James Nelson Barker, *The Indian Princess; or, La Belle Sauvage* (Philadelphia: T&G Palmer, 1808); George Washington Custis, *Pocahontas, or, The Settlers of Virginia* (1830; repr., Alexandria, VA : Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company, 2000); Robert Dale Owen, *Pocahontas: A Historical Drama* (New York: George Dearborn, 1837); Charlotte Mary Sanford Barnes. *The Forest Princess, or Two Centuries Ago* (1844; repr., Philadelphia: E.H. Butler & Co., 1848); Dion Boucicault, *The Octoroon, or, Life in Louisiana : a Play, in Four Acts* (London : Thomas Hailes Lacy, 1866); and various stage productions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* including the most famous, George Aiken, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Or, Life Among the Lowly: A Domestic Drama in Six Acts* (1852; repr., New York: Samuel French Inc, 1959).

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"We Lived Surrounded By Prostitutes"[1]
"Fancy Girl" Sex Slaves, Quadroon Concubines, and Southern Harems

"Almost every Southern planter has a family more or less numerous of illegitimate coloured children"[2]

"Fancy Girl" Sex Slaves

In the grand bazaar of the St. Louis Exchange in 1842, the actor and travelogue writer Louis Tasistro was floored by an astonishing sight. Poised on the auctioneer's block in the center of the room was a gorgeous, extraordinarily light-skinned woman wearing a curve-hugging, low-cut bombasin gown and surrounded by swarms of excited men who ogled at her from below. The auctioneer, yelling over the enthusiastic chatter of the prospective buyers, reeled off her exceptional qualities, which, Tasistro remarked, were "as long as a Welsh pedigree, which is saying a great deal." As the praises of her body, character, work abilities, intelligence, piety, morality and virtue—in that order—spiraled to ever greater proportions, the bids followed suit and, Tasistro writes, "the tug of war commenced."[3]

This woman, introduced to the crowd as "Amanda Mix," was known by buyers, traders, and auctioneers—as well as their wives, who publicly professed ignorance but privately raged about such women—as a "fancy girl." As the highest-priced slaves on the market, "fancies" were sold and registered as "nurses," "domestics," or "housekeepers," but were specifically bought as concubines. A "fancy girl's" exorbitant price reflected the values attached to her skin color, body, character, sexuality, upbringing, accomplishments and virtue—which increased the closer they mirrored those of white women. The auctioneer in Tasistro's account began by showing off the "fancy's" figure as the most basic foundation for her status as a potential concubine. Telling her to step forward and "let the gentlemen see how firm you stand on your corn-stalks," he pronounced her "a beautiful picture" and invited the assembled men to imagine the body underneath the tight dress. Tasistro described the young lady as thoroughly enjoying the attention, proudly displaying her buxom form, blushing prettily at each compliment, and heartily joining in all the laughter and jokes. While many accounts with abolitionist agendas described these women either as weeping delicately or defiantly resisting degradation, Tasistro's scene

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[1] This title refers to a quote from Mary Chesnut, further quoted later in this chapter, complaining that "Under slavery we live surrounded by prostitutes. Like patriarchs of old, our men live in one house with their wives and concubines." Mary Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 21, 22, 40, 41.

[2] Frances Anne Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation 1838-1839* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1864), 15.

[3] Louis Fitzgerald Tasistro, *Random Shots and Southern Breezes, Containing Critical Remarks on the Southern States and Southern Institutions, With Semi-Serious Observations on Men and Manners* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1842), 88.

projected the white slave-buyer's personality preferences onto his subject: clearly, Amanda Mix was the ideal "fancy girl," a vivacious, confident coquette.[4]

With the value of her body established at five hundred dollars, the auctioneer began to laud her character, assuring the buyers that she was "as tractable as a lamb" and "extremely honest and industrious." Requesting her "certificate," he read aloud from a letter—"good-humoredly" pulled out of Amanda Mix's bosom—from her previous owners, testifying that the woman "is a most excellent servant, always obedient, never grumbles, is seldom sick, and is exceedingly fond of children." In other words, in addition to being a beautiful concubine, Amanda Mix would be the ideal type of slave, one who would never draw her owners' age-old complaints about thievery, lying, laziness, and sickliness. She was, moreover, "very generally useful in everything," "an accomplished cook," "good with children," an excellent baker, seamstress, and nurse, and "a real maid-of-all-work."[5] While the field work fit only for the blackest and "lowest" slaves was unmentioned and clearly beneath her, she was the perfect asset to a domestic idyll, skilled at every task that all white wives were expected to have and yet which were increasingly relegated to their slaves.

Tasistro described how the auctioneer then placed his hands on Amanda Mix's head and remarked on a strongly developed "philoprogenitiveness."[6] A "fancy girl," blessed with precious drops of white blood, was supposed to possess a variety of white sensibilities. Besides being more beautiful, intelligent, and domestic than her blacker sisters, "fancies" were often described as being far more delicate and accustomed to relative luxury. One observer noted that in the "jails" where slaves were kept prior to auction, the "fancy" quarters were "not only comfortable, but in many respects luxurious."[7] After all, many "fancy girls" were brought up in relative luxury and style, having been the daughters of domestic slaves whom it was customary to rear within the plantation household itself. In this way, they could be trained to entertain respectable company and to be the best sort of influence on the white children they cared for. Many "fancies" therefore knew, as one ex-slave recalled, "how to talk low and how to act in company," and so possessed some of the qualities of refined white women.[8] The rarest types of "fancies," often those with doting, white, wealthy fathers, even had accomplishments like piano-playing or singing that rivaled those of debutante white southern belles. Clearly, having a "fancy" concubine was a far more respectable type of sexual adventure than a random foray into the slave quarters.[9]

Amanda Mix's bids, having steadily climbed with the pronouncement of each "extraordinary quality," finally peaked with the auctioneer's description of her unblemished

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[4] Ibid., 89. For more information on "fancy girls'" prices and registered duties, see Johnson, *Soul by Soul,* 113—115.
[5] Ibid., 91, 92; For slaveholders' usual complaints about slaves, see: Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household.* For the color division between field and domestic work, see Johnson, *Soul by Soul,* 152.
[6] Tasistro, *Random Shots,* 91; "Philoprogenitiveness" refers to the study of phrenology, then an increasingly popular science, whereby physicians believed that they could read a patient's personality traits in the bumps on their heads. The auctioneer's word may have simply reflected his ignorance of the actual term "phrenology," but as he was feeling Amanda Mix's head and pronouncing her to be intelligent, I have inferred that "philoprogenitive" in this context referred to a well-developed personality and intelligent brain.
[7] Johnson, *Soul by Soul,* 152; Frederick Howe Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co, 1931), 130-131.
[8] Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household,* 153; Mary Anderson quoted in Ibid., 155.
[9] These accomplished "fancies" most often turn up in literary accounts of the "tragic mulattas." See, for example: William Wells Brown, *Clotel; or The President's Daughter: a Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (London: Partridge & Oakey, 1853).

moral character. Asserting that she was an excellent Christian, the auctioneer cried out "Gentlemen, remember what a blessing it is to have a sober and well-contented woman about your wives and daughters, on whose unblemished character you can so entirely rely!"[10] Ironically, of course, Amanda Mix would in essence be a concubine under the very nose of her white mistress—hardly the type of moral paragon a southern lady would wish to be around genteel company and children. Yet in a society where white women's jealousy of their men's liaisons with slaves was well-known—though most often borne in silence—a *seemingly* demure, obedient, virtuous "fancy" could play out the pretense of a happy household. After all, it was customary for these white men to build a separate, "Little House" cabin for their concubines and resulting progeny, and to there establish a "shadow family" that eerily mirrored their "Big House" counterparts.[11] A "fancy girl" like Amanda Mix would, ideally, happily acquiesce to her position and never attempt to usurp her white mistress's authority.

Because Amanda Mix was sold along with her child, the auctioneer was not able to fully capitalize on the qualities that always attracted the highest bids: virtue and chastity. These characteristics most clearly highlight the irony that lay behind the "fancy" trade. Though sold expressly for sexual purposes, a "fancy girl's" sexuality was—at least at first—supposed to resemble that of an ideal white woman rather than a stereotypically promiscuous black slave. Besides the pseudo-scientific ideas surrounding black femininity that had begun in the Middle Ages and increased with the advent of the African slave trade, American slavery itself had contributed to notions of black hyper-sexuality. The fact that slave-owners relied on black women's fertility in order to increase their own profits and yet simultaneously denied them legal marriages meant that whites created a system in which black women were perpetually seen as promiscuous, illegitimate, and uncontrolled by the laws of marriage. Slaves were often seen as having so few qualms about sex that they were just as willing and fecund as animals. Indeed, many wills and estate inventories simply called slave women's children "breedings."[12] One slave recalled that her master was so convinced his slaves possessed bestial sexual natures that he initiated a practice intended to increase his property every nine months: he "took all the fine looking boys and girls that was thirteen years old or older and . . .strip[ped] them naked and put them in a big barn every Sunday and le[ft] them there until Monday morning. Out of that came sixty babies."[13] Furthermore, the fact that white men could and did rape black women with virtually unpunished frequency, and that some black women welcomed whites' sexual advances in hopes of securing a modicum of safety and assistance for themselves and their children, seemed to confirm the notion that all black women were conniving "Jezebels."

A "fancy" who could be sold as a virgin therefore received the highest bids for having, thanks to her inherent "white" virtue, escaped the degradation ascribed to her black blood. In his novel *Clotel*, which he avowed was based on true slave experiences, William Wells Brown

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[10] Tasistro, *Random Shots*, 92.

[11] For white women's silent suffering, see Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*; For "shadow family" see: Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (New York: The Free Press, 1980), 50, 51. The terms "Big House" and "Little House" were often used by contemporaries when speaking of the large plantation home and the small, separate house a master often built for his "fancy." See for example Mary Reynolds quoted in George Rawick, *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, Supplement, Series 2 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1979) 8: 3292.

[12] Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 83.

[13] Dorothy Sterling, *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1984), 32.

described the auction of a beautiful quadroon who claimed descent from Thomas Jefferson. While the auctioneer began with a list of the same qualities that made Amanda Mix desirable, the bids suddenly skyrocketed to four hundred extra dollars as soon as he announced that "the chastity of this girl is pure; she has never been from under her mother's care, she is a virtuous creature."[14] Some accounts illustrate that chastity and virtue were simply taken for granted by an insistent buyer. In her autobiography, the "fancy girl" Louisa Piquet recalled being stripped by slave-buyers at the slave auction until one gentleman protested and insisted she be taken away. "He said he knew I was a virtuous girl, and he'd buy me anyhow," she remembered.[15] Other buyers convinced themselves that the very purchase and use of a "fancy" would in fact *preserve* her virtue and heighten her respectability. Harriet Jacobs, the "fancy girl" mentioned in the Introduction, was willed to Dr. Norcum at the age of twelve, and began receiving—and successfully spurning—his attentions when she turned fifteen. Pleading for her to succumb to his advances, her master insisted that "he was going to build a small house for [her], in a secluded place, four miles away from the town," and insisted that he would "cherish" her and "make a lady out of [her]." The men who bought "fancies" needed to convince themselves of the respectability and ladylikeness—in other words, the relative *whiteness*—of their expensive concubines. Tellingly, when Jacobs' master attempted to remind her of his preferential treatment, he inquired "have I ever treated you like a negro?"[16] The answer, of course, was no: a "fancy" woman's high price indicated her peculiar position within a separate racial and sexual caste. Nonetheless, what went unsaid in the slave markets but was suggested in travelogues and fiction was that, once deflowered, a "fancy girl's" black blood would stir her passions and warm her to a white master's advances. As long as he believed that she was a virgin on the auction block, a "fancy" buyer could convince himself that it was his virile manliness that had awakened her sexual nature.

As evidenced by the qualities hawked from the auction stand, a "fancy girl" therefore possessed the four cardinal virtues of the "cult of true womanhood": piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. In appearance, sensibility, and character, then, she mirrored the ideal southern white woman; in sexuality and sexual *availability*, however, she remained a black slave, her body, life, and progeny owned by her white master. Clearly, a major part of a "fancy girl's" appeal was the fact that her lover could own, use, and dispose of her body in whatever way he wished; unlike white women, a "fancy" had no familial, legal, or societal protections. In her 1860 autobiography, Harriet Jacobs lamented that it was "no matter whether the slave girl be as black as ebony or as fair as her mistress," because "in either case, there is no shadow of law to protect her from insult, from violence, or even from death; all these are inflicted by fiends who bear the shape of men." From the age of fifteen, Jacobs had to endure harassment, threats, and physical abuse from her master, Dr. Norcum. At first, she wrote, "my master began to whisper foul words in my ear," and "peopled my young mind with unclean images, such as only a vile monster could think of."[17] Such conduct would have been almost impossible with, and likely revealed by, an upper-class white woman, but Dr. Norcum knew he could treat his slaves however he wished. When Jacobs continuously spurned his approaches, Norcum resorted to

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[14] Brown, *Clotel*, 64.
[15] Louisa Picquet, *Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon, or, Inside Views of Southern Domestic Life*(New York: The Author, 1861), 6.
[16] Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* 56, 82.
[17] Ibid., 44, 45, 46.

verbal abuse that clearly indicated his fantasy of domination and the extreme frustration he felt at its hindrance. Louisa Piquet recalled in her autobiography that her purchaser had informed her that "if I behave[d] myself he'd treat me well: but, if not, he'd whip me almost to death. . .he was always so jealous. He never let me go out anywhere."[18] Dr. Norcum and Louisa Piquet's owner had been brought up in a society wherein a white man's rights and will were second to none. Their desire to control Harriet and Louisa's lives, bodies, space, sexuality, and personal freedom reflected their wish to assert both racial and sexual omnipotence. Sometimes, this megalomania was revealed in a threat on the "fancies'" lives. "Do you know that I have a right to do as I like with you," Dr. Norcum threatened Jacobs, "that I can kill you, if I please?" Similarly, Louisa Piquet remembered her master telling her that "nothin' but death should separate us; and, if I run off, he'd blow my brains out."[19] An appeal of a "fancy" was, to some men, more than sexual: it gave them a sadistic power over her very life, one they could never have possessed with a white wife protected by law.

The white men who bought "fancies" were almost all from the upper classes, and many cultivated an honorable, respectable reputation. After all, these slaves held the highest prices on the market, so few spendthrift profligates, young "sporting men," or members of the stereotypically disreputable lower classes could afford them. Most often, "fancy" buyers were owners of profitable plantations, wealthy merchants, or successful slave-traders. Furthermore, miscegenation was accepted in the antebellum southern community as long as certain rules were discreetly observed. If the man involved was socially questionable, the relationship became a subject of complaint. If he was, however, a "gentleman" of discretion and local standing, there was usually no public outcry. Even if he had a white wife, she too was expected to hold her tongue about the arrangement, deferring as usual to her husband's apparent good sense and sacrificing her own happiness for her family's reputation.[20]

Although usually sharing similar social backgrounds, "fancy" owners were of a variety of marital categories. Evidence from court cases, newspaper stories, slave narratives, and "fancy" autobiographies highlight a few distinct types. First, there were the men like Harriet Jacobs' owner, Dr. Norcum, who were married to a white wife but established a separate, "Little House" for their "fancies." These were the masters most often mentioned by scandalized Northerners and Europeans in travelogues. Second, there were the younger men—primarily mentioned in romantic novels—who were so struck by a "fancy's" beauty that they lost their hearts and bought her immediately. Sometimes, as with the "fancy" buyer in William Wells Brown's story, *Clotel,* these men were from out of town, "unprepared to behold with composure a beautiful young white girl of fifteen in the degraded position of a chattel slave" and losing themselves to "sympathy [that] ripened into love."[21] Other times, like the young man in Lydia Maria Child's novel, *A Romance of the Republic*, he had been spurned by a white woman or her family, and in his loneliness and desperation lost his heart to a "fancy." A third category consisted of white men who had recently divorced or been separated from their white wives, usually because of the latter's apparent unfaithfulness, malevolence, or other unsuitability. These men, like the owner of Eliza, a companion in Solomon Northup's slave coffle who figured in his autobiography, left their old, "Big Houses" and established their "fancies" as housekeepers in their new, "Little

[18] Picquet, *Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon*, 19.
[19] Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 62; Picquet, *Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon*, 20.
[20] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 308; Williamson, *New People*, 42, 43, 68.
[21] Brown, *Clotel*, 112, 113.

Houses."[22] A fourth category consisted of older widowers like Louisa Piquet's owner. This latter group, it can be assumed, wished to simply buy a doting, companionable "housekeeper" rather than to try their luck with more challenging, young white women, who might desire younger suitors.

Sometimes, men of each category kept their "fancies" their whole lives, rejecting white wives altogether and occasionally emancipating their concubines and mixed-race families in their wills.[23] Piquet's master, for example, told her almost tenderly that when he saw her at the market he thought he'd buy her "to end his days with [her.]"[24] Others, especially those who had bought their "fancies" in their youth, later took a white wife in order to establish a good social standing or to realize various business or political ambitions. Many of these men lived until their deaths with two separate families in two separate households, ignorant of the tragic fate that often befell their "fancies" when the slave women fell into the hands of widowed white wives, were stripped of any willed money, land, or possessions, and subsequently sold.[25]

Some "fancy" owners were quite public about their relations. John Powell, an editor of the New Orleans *Picayune,* entertained his dinner guests at his "fancy" mistress's "Little House," and the slave dealer Theophilus Freeman was reported to receive visitors while lying in bed with his "fancy" Sarah Connor.[26] While such blatant transgressions of social customs were relatively rare, varied accounts agree that the "fancy" practice was common and widely accepted. While in Yazoo City, Mississippi, abolitionist Levi Coffin remarked to his hotel-keeper about two lavishly dressed and bejeweled mixed-race women he had seen that day. To Coffin's astonishment, the hotel-keeper nonchalantly informed him that they were slave mistresses kept by two of the town's wealthy merchants. "Most of our merchants, and other gentlemen of wealth and high standing, keep such women," the man told Coffin. In fact, one of the community's wealthiest men, who, the hotel-keeper assured Coffin "stands fair in this community," had several plantations, keeping a black wife and family on one and a white wife and family on the other. When an appalled Coffin inquired whether the white wife knew of this arrangement, the hotel-keeper replied "yes, but she can't help it, and I don't think she makes any fuss about it."[27] Such a silence shocked many travelers, who insisted that the keeping of "fancy" concubines was outrageously prevalent. The British actress Fanny Kemble reported that "it is notorious, that almost every southern planter has a family more or less numerous of illegitimate coloured children."[28] Even southern white women admitted in their private diaries that sexual slavery was rampant. "Under slavery we live surrounded by prostitutes," the wealthy plantation mistress Mary Chesnut wrote in her famous Civil War diary. "Like patriarchs of old, our men live in one house with their wives and concubines; . . . Any lady is ready to tell who is the father of all the

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[22] Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave* (New York: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855), 52, 53.
[23] For court cases evidencing this, see Helen Tunnicliff Catterall, *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro,* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1926-37), 2: 17, 29, 45, 357, 367, 382, 426, 430, 439, 451, 470, 515, 530, 585.
[24] Picquet, *Louisa Picquet the Octoroon,* 16.
[25] For evidence on such cases, see Catterall, *Judicial Cases,* 2: 17, 29, 45, 357, 367, 382, 426, 430, 439, 451, 470, 515, 530, 585. See also Index, "cohabitation, wills" and "widows."
[26] Johnson, *Soul by Soul,* 114.
[27] Levi Coffin, *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin, The Reputed President of the Underground Railroad* (1876; repr., Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1880), 518.
[28] Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation,* 15.

mulatto children in everybody's household but their own. Those she seems to think drop from the clouds."[29]

"Extravagantly described to me as females beautiful beyond all others"[30]

Quadroon *Plaçage*

"Fancy" buyers were usually men who lived in rural southern areas, or merchants who dealt specifically in slaves. For men in the rare, urban centers of the South, a separate practice became increasingly popular and notorious. The city of New Orleans, alternately under Spanish and French rule until the American takeover in 1803, was the epicenter of a complex system of concubinage known as *plaçage,* which had been set up to link the free quadroon community to white men with particular sexual tastes. Interracial sex had been widespread, acknowledged, and generally condoned in French and Spanish New Orleans society. Yet the quadroon mistresses became so famous, and the system itself so intricate and well-established, that *plaçage* seamlessly continued into the American takeover. Travelers to New Orleans rarely failed to comment on the magnificent "quadroon balls," the gorgeous concubines, and their well-satisfied patrons. Such descriptions were so fascinating to northern audiences that periodicals abounded with excerpts from travelogues specifically detailing the remarkable system.

Ostensibly, Americans continued the practice of holding quadroon balls in order to supplement their *de jure* authority with cultural capital as they acted out the role of insiders. The first governmentally sanctioned ball occurred just two years after the Louisiana Purchase, and by 1809 they had reached the official status of an "institution."[31] A man who wanted a quadroon mistress went through a series of elaborate steps that mirrored the dances at the balls themselves. First, he paid two dollars at the door of the ballroom, a considerable sum that kept out the "riff-raff" and ensured that only men with the means to keep a mistress could enter. He was then required to leave any knives, pistols, or other arms he kept about his person with an attendant; too many prior instances of bloody duels fought over quadroons had tightened restrictions.[32] Of course, the very fact that men were prepared to fight duels—the established means by which they established their "honor" and protected that of their women—meant that these quadroon mistresses were given far higher statuses than prostitutes or other black women.[33] Once in the ballroom, a man was confronted with a fantastic panorama of bright colors, waving feathers, expensive fabrics, swinging hoop skirts, elaborate hairdos and magnificent masks. Although men certainly acknowledged each other at these balls, and their whole purpose was to seek out a beauty fair enough to be a paramour, most attendees wore masks. Masquerades were the most popular kinds of balls in New Orleans, but the practice most likely also added an element of mystery, exoticism, and romance to the quadroon balls, specifically. Furthermore, a mask enabled a quadroon—known as a *placée*—to coquettishly hide her full charms from all but her

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[29] Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War,* 21, 22, 40, 41.
[30] George William Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion Through the Slave States* (London: John Murray 1844), 2: 265.
[31] Floyd D. Cheung, "'Les Cenelles' and Quadroon Balls: 'Hidden Transcripts' of Resistance and Domination in New Orleans, 1803-1845," *The Southern Literary Journal* 29, no. 2 (Spring, 1997): 6, 8.
[32] Bernhard, *Travels through North America,* 1: 62.
[33] For more on the meaning of duels in the culture of honor, see Wyatt-Brown, Chapter Thirteen, "Personal Strategies and Community Life: Hospitality, Gambling, and Combat," in *Southern Honor*; Greenberg, Chapter Three, "Gifts, Strangers, Duels, and Humanitarianism," in *Honor and Slavery.*

most interested suitors, and for the suitor himself to feel a particular ownership of his mistress's features.[34]

Once a man found a woman who suited his desires, he made an arrangement to meet with her and her protector at a future date. The *placée's* business agent was usually her mother, who had often been a quadroon mistress herself, and had ushered her daughter into the process after her. Of course, as her daughter was almost always the child of a white lover, *plaçage* ensured that each, progressive generation became whiter and whiter. Travelers often remarked in astonishment at the radiant color spectrum that existed at the balls, ranging from olive-complexioned ladies wearing fantastic turbans to lily-white creatures with flaxen curls. At the first meeting, the would-be suitor arranged every last financial detail with the quadroon's protector. They established a location for the house he would set up for his mistress, as well as the value of the furniture and the yearly allowance with which he would provide her. Finally, they agreed upon a system of child support for any offspring that might result, especially in the event of the quadroon's abandonment. From that time on, the *placée* belonged to her paramour for as long as he wished to keep her. Although born free and therefore granted more rights than an enslaved "fancy girl," a quadroon *placée* was nonetheless considered "black" no matter the shade of her complexion, and was therefore denied the legal and societal protections granted to white women. Because she was not legally married, she could not run to the courts in the occasion of abuse or abandonment. Her lover could choose either to keep her as his *de facto* wife, marry another woman and flaunt her as his mistress, or abandon her as soon as his desire flagged, his finances failed, or a better opportunity with a white wife arose.[35] Because the two systems of concubinage—"fancy" enslavement and quadroon *plaçage*—so closely mirrored each other, this dissertation will collectively refer to both kinds of women as "quadroon mistresses."

Like the "fancy" owners, men who kept *placées* were usually of relatively high economic standing. It appears, however, that they came from a wider variety of classes, and that the maintenance of a *placée* was somewhat easier than that of a "fancy." In his travelogue *A Journey to the Seaboard Slave States*, Frederick Law Olmsted remarked that an apartment with a *placée* as housekeeper was by far the cheapest option for a young man "on the make."[36] Perrin du Lac, in his own travelogue, explained that "many men would rather live in concubinage with a woman than marry. In that way they enjoy the advantage of being well cared for, along with the option of dismissing the woman if she proves unsatisfactory or unfaithful."[37] New Orleans wills provide one means by which to ascertain how common and widespread this practice was. Between 1810 and 1860, about 7% of wills mentioned interracial union, either by frankly acknowledging their mistresses, mentioning their mixed-race children, or listing a quadroon housekeeper as a

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[34] For more on the popularity of masquerades in New Orleans and the South in general, and their relation to the "culture of honor," see Greenberg, Chapter Two, "Masks and Slavery," in *Honor and Slavery*.

[35] Cheung, "'Les Cenelles," 6, 8; For more secondary sources explaining this practice, see: Edward Larocque Tinker, *Creole City: Its Past and its People* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co, 1953), 260-270; Liliane Crété, *Daily Life in Louisiana 1815-1830* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 81-82; Francois-Xavier Martin and Robert C. Reinders, *The History of Louisiana From the Earliest Period* (Pelican Publishing Company, 1976); Sybil Kein, *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000). The only comprehensive work on quadroon balls is Monique Guillory's dissertation, "Some Enchanted Evening on the Auction Block." The most detailed explanation of plaçage in a primary source is found in: Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion Through the Slave States,* 2: 267-269.

[36] Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States,* 598—600.

[37] Perrin du Lac, *Voyages in the Two Louisianas* (1805), quoted in Crété, *Daily Life in Louisiana,* 81.

suspiciously fortunate beneficiary. Interestingly, these wills run the gamut from massive estates to relatively meager holdings. The occupations and literacy rates of the male testators also represent a relatively wide range of social classes. Of course, these wills certainly do not reflect *all* the unions taking place, nor do they all involve the specific system of *plaçage.* Nonetheless, they assist in demonstrating how widespread interracial unions were.[38] Furthermore, reports of quadroon balls and the practice of *plaçage* were not limited to New Orleans. The cities of Charleston in South Carolina, Natchez and Biloxi in Mississippi, Mobile in Alabama, and St. Augustine and Pensacola in Florida, also had their own versions of the institution.[39]

Regardless of this relatively broad class distribution, it is clear that, for many men, a *placée* was a sign of social prestige, like a handsome buggy or a racing horse.[40] Furthermore, the ability to openly flaunt such women seems to have been a source of particular pride, and a way to establish white male hegemony. The Reverend Philo Tower, a Northerner who had been sympathetic to slavery until a voyage around the South opened his eyes to its abuses, published a travelogue that was loudly indignant about *plaçage.* "These monstrous unions," Tower proclaimed, "have not even the reserve of vice, which conceals itself from shame." Indeed, rather than remaining cloistered in their specially furnished apartments, Tower was appalled to see the *placées* prancing down public streets in their new finery, and hanging on the arms of their white paramours. "They expose themselves openly to all eyes," Tower described in disgust, "without any infamy or blame attaching to the men who thus demean themselves."[41] In an unpublished manuscript from 1825, Judge Charles Gayarré wrote that *placées* were given their own boxes in the opera's second tier. He mentions that one Creole planter had one box established for his wife and white family, and another right above it reserved for his *placée*. Arrangements like these, Gayarré explained, were the reason there were so few houses of prostitution in New Orleans.[42]

A great many men journeyed to New Orleans with the express purpose of catching glimpses of these infamous concubines. The popularity of the subject is evidenced not only by the fact that almost every southern travelogue mentioned *plaçage,* but that a considerable number of periodicals chose to publish those specific excerpts. "The Quadroon Creoles hav[e] been somewhat extravagantly described to me as females beautiful beyond all others," the British geographer George William Featherstonhaugh confided in *Excursion Through the Slave States,* and a correspondent for the Boston paper *Little's Living Age* admitted that he "made a point of going to some of the quadroon balls," as he "had heard a great deal of the splendid figures and graceful dancing of the New Orleans Quadroons."[43]

Wilson Conworth, a regular travel writer for the widely popular *Knickerbocker*, wrote an exceptionally blunt account of the "dissipation" he sought among the quadroons, titling his section "Quadroon Women—Schools of Sensuality."[44] By 1840, the *Knickerbocker* was the most

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[38] Paul F. Lachance, "The Formation of a Three-Caste Society: Evidence from Wills in Antebellum New Orleans," *Social Science History* 18, no. 2 (Summer, 1994), 211-242.
[39] Virginia Meacham Gould, ed., *Chained to the Rock of Adversity, To Be Free, Black & Female in the Old South* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), xix, lii.
[40] Créte, *Daily Life in Louisiana,* 82.
[41] Reverend Philo Tower, *Slavery Unmasked: Being a Truthful Narrative of a Three Years' Residence and Journeying in Eleven Southern States* (New York: E. Darrow & Brother, 1856), 337-41.
[42] Judge Gayarré quoted in Tinker, *Creole City,* 261.
[43] Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion Through the Slave States,* 2: 265; "Sullivan's Rambles," *Littell's Living Age,* E. Littell, ed., (Boston: E. Littell & Company, 1852), 35: page not listed.
[44] Conworth, "Wilson Conworth, Number Nine," 100-101.

influential literary publication of its time, flirting with the standards of propriety, pandering to the male "sporting culture," and often echoing the style of the "flash press."[45] Conworth quite openly declared himself a "sporting man," and explained that his sole reason for going to New Orleans was to "dissipate my cares and to make a bold rush at something." Confessing that he and his friends were "not fairly sober during the whole time of our stay in the city," Conworth indulged his northern readers with a scandalous description of his escapades, catering to the notions of southern depravity that had been fed by abolitionist tracts like Tower's, and inadvertently fanned into a sexual fantasy. "Northerners have no idea of the utter want of principle that characterizes the southern man of pleasure," Conworth wrote, teetering on the edge of both condemnation and envy,

> [T]he grossness, the debauchery, the sensuality, that walks in open day, and glories in its degradation. Here is every thing to entice the senses; and the blood of the northerner [is] warmed up by the climate; his senses fascinated by novel and luxurious allurements to sensual pleasure; . . . [Many, when they return to the North,] pine for the freedom from restraint which the South affords. [46]

Obviously aware that a number of his readers followed his accounts specifically in order to live vicariously through his experiences, Conworth then detailed the quadroon balls he knew many were salivating after. The quadroons, he sighed, "look[ed] like angels," but laid all the traps of the devil, scintillating with "enticements of dress, and passion, and complexion, and winning smiles, to waylay the imprudent." Furthermore, he explained, many of the women were undoubtedly chaste, "wear[ing] brows adorned with the virgin wreath." This, however, he appraised not as an attribute deserving of respect, but one that sent their market value through the roof. "They are to be bought and consumed," he wrote, "No man can look upon these young girls, panting to be bought. . .with indifference. They have been educated for the market."[47] Clearly, their virginity was simply another "enticement," promising their suitors an untouched body and a "panting" desire that had yet to be coaxed into full-fledged sexual passion.

Conworth went on to describe the quadroon *placées* in a way that echoed their depictions in popular literature. He waxed lyrical about their "black flashing eyes, swimming in passion; their luxurious persons . . . fifteen years of age, and yet blooming in all the richness of womanhood." Confirming a number of previous accounts, he stated that "they certainly, though not of full blood, are the most beautiful women in the world." Taking for granted that his audience understood the stereotypically lustful, uncontrollable nature of American manhood, Conworth wrote that he and his friends were so charmed by the beautiful quadroons that "we did not stop to reason very profoundly about vice and virtue, but gave ourselves up to the fascination of the senses. Young men are apt to form very strong sensual attachments."[48] In this way, Conworth excused his and his friends' conduct by playing on societal and pseudo-scientific expectations, and by drawing on the stereotype of the black "Jezebel." He thus placed the blame for seduction on the quadroons and their irresistible "enticements," despite their professed virginity and angelic appearance.

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[45] Perry Miller, *The Raven and the Whale: The War of Words and Wits in the Era of Poe and Melville* (New York: Harvest Book, 1956), 12.
[46] Conworth, "Wilson Conworth, Number Nine," 98-100.
[47] Ibid., 100-101.
[48] Ibid., 102-103.

Lest he disappoint his readers, Conworth went on to relate a questionably true story about his own relationship with a quadroon *placée*. He continued to play on the stereotypes his audience was sure to have collected from other travelogues and fictional literature. Quadroons were thought to be almost obsessively loyal to their patrons. Rather than attributing this to the fact that their livelihood depended upon their paramour's magnanimity, this devotion was actually seen as an inherent part of their ardent nature. "One young girl gave herself to me of her own accord," Conworth remembered, suggesting that the quadroon's virginity was willingly relinquished without even a business arrangement. Lest his readers suppose that she was a woman of low morals or a prostitute, Conworth assured them that "She said she loved me, and I was very well pleased with the adventure; . . . She would willingly have given me all she possessed. She would have left the city with me." In fact, her adoration was so zealous that Conway claimed she was prepared to sacrifice herself for him: when he was thrown into prison for reneging on his gambling debts, "she found me out, and clung to me as if her whole life was at stake. She wished to heap money upon me, for she had money from some source. She would have purchased my release by the prostitution of her person to one she loathed." Such passion, commitment, forgiveness, and sacrifice must have appeared deeply romantic to Conworth's readers, who may have reflected that these traits were rather rare in a respectable, staunchly moral white woman. Interestingly, Conworth ended his story in a sincerely regretful tone, admitting that he left his quadroon only to find her, years later, "in the lowest grade of wretchedness and vice—very sad."[49] Rather than moralizing that such an end was fitting for one so willing to prostitute herself, Conway's tone suggests that he and his thoughtless, callous youth were to blame. He therefore played on readers' sympathies, hinting that such total dependence was rather alluring: a kind of fantasy of ownership that secured total female submission and male dominance. Society *expected* white women to entirely submit to white men's authority, but it *forced* black women to do so. Such a requirement surely titillated many white men's fantasies of total social, sexual, and racial mastery.

"This is a view of the subject that it is thought best for women to ignore"[50]
White Women's Reactions

White women were certainly aware of the "fancy girls" on surrounding plantations, the cottages on New Orleans' infamous Rampart Street, the quadroon balls that competed with their own gatherings, the occupants of the opera's second tier, and the dark-complexioned ladies sighted on the arms of respectable white men. Yet society strictly instructed white women to ignore these practices, holding that they were unfit for chaste female discussion and impossible for them to understand. Like the brothels in northern cities, "fancy girls" and quadroon *placées* were to be chalked up to men's uncontrollable sexual appetites. Some men, like pro-slavery activist William Henry Harper, even instructed women on the beneficial nature of these interracial unions, explaining that the degradation of black women helped to keep ravening male appetites away from the rarified pedestals of pure, white women.[51]

When Judge Gayarré watched one of his New Orleans hosts appear at home with a black arm band to commemorate the death of his *placée*, it was therefore fitting that the man scold his

[49] Ibid., 102-103
[50] Diary of Ella Gertrude Thomas, Jan 2, 1858, quoted in Williamson, *New People*, 68.
[51] Harper, *The Proslavery Argument*, 41.

curious wife, "Madame that is something about which you must not inquire."[52] White women, however, seethed at the blatant sexual double standard in private. Like Mary Chesnut railing about life "surrounded by prostitutes" in her Civil War Diary, Ella Thomas betrayed her desperation and fury in an 1858 journal entry. "I know that this is a view of the subject that it is thought best for women to ignore," she wrote, "but where we see so many. . .'fancy girls' Oh is it not enough to make us shudder for the standard of morality in our Southern homes!"[53] Although society assured white women of their vaunted status and the respect of white men, it was becoming glaringly obvious that non-white women were receiving far more attention, money, and adulation than was seemly. The reality was that interracial unions were increasingly widespread: white men were devoting a considerable portion of their income to the liaisons, some were choosing concubinage over marriage, and a significant amount of literature was catering to these appetites and even declaring blatant preferences for "colored" over white women. Were these non-white paramours therefore becoming a true threat to white wives?

The Reverend Philo Tower certainly thought so. He was appalled at the small proportion of men who had families in New Orleans. "Probably not one in twenty is married," he reported, and if a man was, he simply "le[ft] a family at the North, and while here entirely forgets that at home he has left a wife." Many travelogues confessed that men simply couldn't help but forget their frigidly respectable white wives when the warm arms of darker ladies beckoned. Alexander Wilson, a nineteenth-century European poet, wrote while visiting Charleston that "the negro wenches are all sprightliness and gaiety," and that "their sexual habits" were so eager and energetic that they "render[ed] the [white] men callous" to the questionable charms of white women's "frigid insipidity." The Englishmen George Featherstonhaugh and S.A Ferrall agreed in their respective travelogues, calling the quadroons they saw, both slave and free, "females beautiful beyond all others" and "decidedly the finest women in the country." Even the American-born Frederick Law Olmsted admired the *placées* for being "frequently sent to Paris to be educated," and therefore "very accomplished" as well as exceptionally beautiful. "I have rarely, if ever, met more beautiful women," he confessed. "They are much better formed, and have a much more graceful and elegant carriage than Americans in general."[54]

The bluntest comparison between white and black American women was made by the German nobleman Bernhard, Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, who published a travelogue of his wanderings in North America from 1825 to 1826. Having attended an exhausting number of white, upper-class balls in New Orleans, he finally slipped away with a number of other men to a nearby quadroon ball. This he admitted to enjoying far more, and when he guiltily crept back into the white ball, he "could not . . . refrain from making comparisons, which in no wise redounded to the advantage of the white assembly." The fact was, the Duke reflected, the quadroon balls were simply more *fun*, and men who attended them "amused themselves more, and were more at ease." Such a preference was glaringly obvious in the white ball, which gradually became so depleted of young men that the Duke finally noticed that "there were more ladies than gentlemen present." Rather than deploring the situation, however, the Duke simply

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[52] Judge Gayarré quoted in Tinker, *Creole City*, 261.
[53] Diary of Ella Gertrude Thomas, Jan 2, 1858; quoted in Williamson, *New People*, 68.
[54] Tower, *Slavery Unmasked*, 322; Alexander Wilson, *The Poems and Prose of Alexander Wilson*, ed. Alexander Groshart (Paisley: Alex Gardner, 1876), 1: 167-168; Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion Through the Slave States*, 2: 26; S.A. Ferrall, Esq., *A Ramble of Six Thousand Miles Through The United States of America* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1832), 192; Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 594.

explained that the preference was completely understandable. "Several of these females have enjoyed the benefits of as careful an education as most of the whites," he wrote, conferring a degree of respectability and status on the quadroons. "They conduct themselves ordinarily with more propriety and decorum, and confer more happiness on their 'friends,' than many of the white ladies to their married lords."[55] They were, in the Duke's eyes, truly the perfect concubines, throwing balls that were far more amusing, proffering charms that were far more available, and caring for their paramours with far greater passion, than white women. Such an unfavorable racial comparison was even evident to another woman, the British travelogue writer Matilda Houstoun, who wrote that the white women in New Orleans were "remarkably indolent" and "apt to grow extremely corpulent." They were, moreover, only "very slightly educated" and so lazy that "love-making . . . requires too much thought and exertion to be ever a popular amusement with them." As a result, Houstoun understood why "the quadroon balls [we]re very much resorted to by white gentlemen."[56]

Of course, the situation is far more complicated than a simple explanation of white frigidity or laziness versus "colored" warmth and passion. Certainly, many white women must have desired to care for their husbands with as much fervor and devotion as were attributed to quadroon mistresses. It seems, however, that stereotypes of "respectable" white female sexuality, the status that a concubine appeared to confer, and the fact that many men were absent from their homes on extended business trips, combined to create a rather sterile sexual environment for many southern white wives. By the eve of the Civil War, a few women were feeling threatened enough to speak publicly about the issue. A Virginian woman named Mrs. Douglass wrote a letter intended to be distributed to the public. The fact that she wrote this incendiary message from jail, where she had been imprisoned for teaching slaves to read, suggests that she was far more radical in her views than most southern women. Nonetheless, the fact that she dared to expose the "crisis of femininity" she saw occurring in the South proves that many women were aware and deeply concerned about the predicament. "Amalgamation," she declared, "is one great evil hanging over the Southern Slave States, destroying domestic happiness and the peace of thousands." Insisting that the practice was "more general than even the Southerners are willing to allow," Douglass proclaimed that "it pervades the entire society. Its followers are to be found among all ranks, occupations, and professions." Casting aside the vow of silence white women had unofficially been forced to take on the issue, Douglass wrote that

> [T]he white mothers and daughters of the South have suffered under it for years—have seen their deepest affections trampled upon—their hopes for domestic happiness destroyed, and their future lives embittered, even to agony, by those who should be all in all to them, as husbands, sons and brothers.[57]

Perhaps most southern women thought that Mrs. Douglass was treading on dangerous ground, pandering to the wishes of the abolitionists who published biographies of "fancy girls" and wrote novels about beautiful, tragic quadroon mistresses in order to galvanize northern sympathy. Yet if many of these same autobiographies and other slave testimonies are to be believed, a number of southern women felt threatened enough to lash out in their own ways at

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[55] Bernhard, *Travels through North America,* 1: 58-63.
[56] Matilda Charlotte Houstoun, *Hesperos: or, Travels in the West* (London: John W. Parker, 1850), 1: 74.
[57] Mrs. Virginia Douglass quoted in Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States,* 601.

the "Jezebels" they felt were stealing their white men. Harriet Jacobs' autobiography, for example, revealed a number of stories of the wild, almost dangerous jealousy some white wives unleashed on their husbands' "fancy girls." Jacobs remembered seeing a young slave girl dying soon after the birth of her nearly white child, and recalled that, as the girl screamed in agony, her white mistress stood by and mocked "You suffer, do you? I am glad of it. You deserve it all, and more too." It would seem that, to this woman, the blame for the illicit relation lay entirely with the slave girl: she had lured the white man away with her bewitching sexual charms and left his white wife a betrayed fool. Jacobs' own mistress, Mrs. Norcum, unleashed her misery and fury upon the young slave when she learned of her husband's advances. After Jacobs had confided her sexual harassment to the woman, Mrs. Norcum became fanatical in her supervision. Jacobs wrote that she often woke up in the middle of the night to find her mistress bending over her, ensuring that she was not with her master. Other times she was awakened by whispers in her ear as Mrs. Norcum pretended to be her husband, murmuring sexual invitations in the attempt to catch Jacobs in the act of answering encouragingly.[58] Such behavior seems almost a perverse kind of titillation, as though Mrs. Norcum desired to both participate as a voyeur in a possible sexual encounter and to learn the means by which she thought Jacobs seduced her husband. It betrays her fear of both the slave girl's potential power and the threat to her marriage.

Some white women attempted to eradicate a quadroon mistress's threat by removing some of her power, especially her physical beauty. Because a white mistress would almost certainly incur her husband's wrath if she physically abused these women, she had to resort to a more creative type of attack. Numerous accounts tell of black mistresses whose hair was shorn off by a jealous white woman. A quadroon's hair, after all, was usually remarked upon for being especially smooth and delicately curled, a feature that indicated her whiteness. One slave, Jack Maddox, recalled a time his master brought home a lovely mulatto girl who had gorgeous long, black, straight hair. His wife emerged from the house and demanded "what you bring that thing here for," to which her husband sheepishly replied "honey, I brung her here for you. She going do your fine needle work." Maddox recalled his mistress responding furiously "Fine needlework, your hind leg!"[59] As soon as her husband was away, the woman grabbed a pair of scissors and cropped the girl's hair to the skull.

In New Orleans, white women tried a similar tactic to hide the hair of the free quadroons. As far back as 1788, when *plaçage* was prevalent under Spanish rule, white women pushed for a law that forbade black women to wear fancy hats. They were forced to wear scarves tied around their heads as turbans, a fashion that, ironically, many male travelers remarked upon with great admiration as adding another additional element of exoticism.[60] American women in New Orleans attempted to up the ante, prohibiting quadroons from driving through the streets in carriages, sitting in the presence of white ladies, or entering white apartments without special permission. They also secured their right to whip quadroons, even if the latter were not slaves, should the latter verbally abuse them in the presence of witnesses.[61] As with the turbans, however, such restrictions were simply loose bindings through which white men consistently

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[58] Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* 24, 54.

[59] Jack and Rose Maddox quoted in Rawick, *The American Slave,* Supplement, Series 2, 7: 2531. Other instances of "fancies'" hair being shorn can be found in Rawick's other volumes, as well as in the fictional literature. Slave narratives mentioning the practice include: Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*; Picquet, *Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon*; Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*.

[60] Kein, *Creole,* 61.

[61] Bernhard, *Travels Through North America,* 1: 61—62.

created loopholes. After all, quadroons walking in the street were far more visible to admiring gazes than those in carriages, and separation between white wives and quadroon mistresses was to be preferred. The conduct of the auctioneer at Louisa Picquet's sale displayed the nonchalance with which many white men treated these jealous attacks. Although Picquet's mistress had chopped off all her hair in a fit of pique before selling her, the action did not lessen her price. The auctioneer simply informed the buyers that, when it grew back, the hair would be sleek, straight, and smooth—just as a "fancy's" should be.[62] His and the buyers' indifference points to the probability that these desperate counter-attacks by white women did nothing to turn their husbands from the pursuit of their fantasies.

The reality is that white wives were reacting to a threat that, in some instances, became so real that it actually toppled them from their pedestals and inverted the racial hierarchy. For one thing, quadroon mistresses very often provided their paramours with children, even when the men already had white families. These children were often financially supported by their white fathers, and sometimes even educated, sent abroad, emancipated, or willed property and wealth upon their fathers' death.[63] The existence of such a family could therefore pose a threat to a white woman's own children. One interview with the ex-slave Mary Reynolds illuminates the type of disaster that could befall a plantation where racial boundaries were so blatantly transgressed. Reynolds' master, Dr. Kilpatrick, who was both husband and father to a white family, also kept a "yellow gal dressed in fine style" in a separate, "Small House" on his plantation. Although he claimed she was his seamstress, Reynolds insisted that the entire plantation knew she bore him "a mess of white younguns" to whom she taught fine manners and dressed in fashionable clothing. One day, the two eldest mulatto children wandered down to the "Big House" and attempted to play with the white children in their doll house. According to Reynolds, Kilpatrick's white son informed them that "you can't go in the doll house 'cause that is for white chillun." Kilpatrick's mulatto son informed him importantly that "we ain't no Niggers 'cause we got the same dada you got," and that "he comes to see us every day and fetches us our clothes and things from town." An ensuing fight brought the entire affair to the attention of Mrs. Kilpatrick, who approached her husband upon his return home. Reynolds remembers Mrs. Kilpatrick saying slyly, "I'm studying in my mind about them white younguns of that yellow Nigger wench from Baton Rouge. . . . It looks kinda funny that they got the same kind of hair and eyes as my chillun and they got a nose that looks like yours." When Mr. Kilpatrick flatly denied the accusation as just "the talk of little chillun," his wife reminded him meaningfully that "over in Mississippi I got a home and plenty with my dada." The threat of leaving—or perhaps of telling her father of Kilpatrick's infidelity—was apparently sufficient to make her husband buy her a new span of horses in an effort at compensation. Yet Reynolds remembered that her owners' relationship forever changed after that. Mrs. Kilpatrick became cold and distant with her husband, and never had any more children with him. She had used up all the weapons a white woman had: she had accused her husband, threatened to leave or tell her family, ended the loving relationship expected of a wife, and stopped welcoming him into her bed. Such actions, however, appear to have been futile, for Reynolds remembered that the "yellow gal" continued to have

[62] Picquet, *Louisa Picquet, the Octoroon*, 16.
[63] For court case evidence, see: Catterall, *Judicial Cases*, 2: 17, 29, 45, 357, 367, 382, 426, 430, 439, 451, 470, 515, 530, 585.

more and more "white younguns," though they were never again allowed near the "Big House." In this instance, at least, a white man had truly replaced his white wife with his "fancy."[64]

The bulk of evidence for such a replacement, however, appears in a number of shocking court cases in which spurned white wives brought evidence of their husband's infidelity to court in an attempt to receive alimony. Divorce was highly frowned upon in antebellum America, especially in the South, and petitions from women accusing their husbands of interracial affairs were unusual. After all, besides the taboo against divorce, most white women obeyed the unofficial vow of silence on such matters. Nonetheless, as historian Joshua Rothman observed in an analysis of 192 divorce cases in Virginia from 1803 to 1851, such petitions were far from rare. Slightly more than sixteen per cent of all divorce bills passed by the Virginia General Assembly in the antebellum period involved interracial adultery. Many divorce petitions from a variety of states involved a white wife pressing for divorce after discovering a "fancy" concubine, or being slandered by neighbors.[65] A few, however, illustrate the lengths to which some white men were prepared to degrade a white wife, taking cruel advantage of the submissive role into which societal conventions had straight-jacketed her. In *Jelineau v Jelineau* in 1801, Mrs. Jelineau held that her husband cohabited with his "fancy" and lavished his attention on their mulatto child. Were this not degrading enough, she testified that he "daily insulted" her and encouraged his "fancy" to do the same. Apparently determined to humiliate her and upend the social hierarchy, he forced them all to dine at the same table. One day, when she reached to serve herself some food, he snatched her plate from her and told her she could only eat after he and his "fancy" had finished.[66]

Another case in 1849, *Hansley v Hansley,* involved a similar domestic inversion. Mrs. Hansley testified that her husband had abandoned her bed entirely, sleeping exclusively with his "fancy," Lucy. He also deprived his wife "of all those domestic duties . . . which belong to a wife," and placed Lucy in full control of the household. He constantly insulted his wife, telling her she was "an encumbrance" and requiring her to submit to Lucy's authority. He, like Jelineau, encouraged his "fancy" to mock and disdain his wife, and would devise particularly demeaning situations. Mrs. Hansley wrote that often, at night, he would force her to sleep with him and yet would bring Lucy into the bed at the same time. At these times it was Lucy he "treated as his wife," which likely means that it was she with whom he engaged in sexual intercourse as his wife lay beside her. Both Jelineau and Hansley appear to have taken great pains to *literally* replace their white wives with their "fancies," constantly reminding the white women that they were failing in both sexual and domestic duties. Hansley's use of the word "encumbrance" is very telling: to him, his white wife was simply a façade catering to social niceties and tradition, screening the true relationship that, because of laws against mixed marriages, remained impossible to make public. Upon the success of the divorce case, Mr. Hansley declared that he "would part with all the property he had before he would with . . . Lucy and his child."[67] The "fancy" had become more important than his wife, his wealth, his home, and his reputation.

A number of men actually left their legitimate wives and took up with their mistresses in another establishment, claiming them as wife. Others left the country entirely, hoping to obtain a legal marriage elsewhere. One man appears to have indulged in a fantasy of polygamy. His white

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[64] Mary Reynolds quoted in Rawick, *The American Slave,* Supplement, Series 2, 8: 3292.
[65] See Catterall, 160, 167, 505, 579.
[66] *Jelineau v Jelineau*, 2 Desaussure 45, June 1801, in Catterall, 2: 281.
[67] *Hansley v Hansley*, 10 Iredell 506, December 1849, in Catterall, 139.

wife's petition claimed that he "indulg[ed] in illicit intercourse even in his own house with the vilest blacks of the Town, and even openly boasted of the number of his black wives."[68] Evelina Newman's petition raised the specter of the most frightening predicament: the loss of support not only of herself but also her children. She stated that her husband had brought his "fancy" and their two, mixed-race children into his own household and treated them as his legitimate family, forcing his own, white family to undertake the domestic chores reserved for slaves. Evelina proclaimed that her husband "stat[ed] that the two children were his and that he meant upon principle, to do more for them, than for his lawful children."[69] Although many of these divorce petitions were rejected, partly because interracial affairs were so common, these latter three were granted because they so blatantly perverted the southern social structure. The "crisis of femininity," then, was very apparent to whites and blacks, travelers and native Southerners—but as long as it stayed within certain bounds, keeping non-white women in degrading sexual roles and white women in vaunted, legitimate positions, it could be ignored as a "natural" aspect of gender relations. As soon as the sexual hierarchy overturned the racial hierarchy, however, the crisis became an immediate threat that the courts acted to quash.

In many of these cases, the white woman's voice comes through in her defense of her own marital conduct. Of course, it was in her own interest to project herself as an innocent victim, and to profess that she had gone to every length to save her marriage and be an ideal wife. Yet many of the testimonies have a ring of truth: the women sound genuinely confused and hurt that the respectable, wifely, *white* conduct they'd been instructed in their whole lives had failed to win their husbands' love and devotion. Many first mentioned their respectable families and high statuses, establishing themselves in the middle and upper classes and therefore as adherents to Victorian standards of womanhood. Lucy Watts declared she was born "of the most respectable parentage," and Sophia Dobyns stated that she had "enjoyed all the blessings which can result from parental tenderness, all the advantages which are derived from education, and all the benefits arising from the fortune and high standing in society of her deceased father." All insisted that they had entered their marriage with, as Lucy Watts said "no improper motives," but only with the desire to love and care for their husbands. Watts said she had given her husband "sincere and ardent affection," and Dobyns that she had expected "a fulfillment, of those youthfull anticipations, of reciprocal attachment and blissful old age." Mary Terry wrote that she had been a "dutiful and affectionate wife," and Janet Hunter that she had "performed the part of an affectionate, conciliating and virtuous wife and employed all the means of her power to render [her husband] happy and contented."[70]

Perhaps the key to these women's confusion lay in the very words they used to describe their wifely conduct: "dutiful," "virtuous," and especially "affectionate" are adjectives that are continually repeated in a number of petitions. On the one hand, this clearly exemplifies these women's need to use Victorian standards of wifely conduct and the ideology of the "cult of true

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[68] Petition of Janet Hunter, 15 December, 1823, Petersburg, #8074a, Legislative Petitions, Records of the General Assembly, Record Group 78, Archives Division, Library of Virginia, Richmond.

[69] Petition of Evelina Gregory Roane, 2 December 1824, King William County, #8122, Ibid.

[70] Petition of Lucy Watts, 8 Dec 1834, Amherst County, #10691, Ibid.; Petition of Sophia Dobyns, 16 December 1817, Bedford County, #A1741, Ibid; Petition of Mary Terry, 2 February, 1851, Goochland County, #17611, Ibid.; Petition of Petition of Janet Hunter, 15 December, 1823, Petersburg, #8074a, Ibid.; For more details on these petitions, all from Virginia, see: Joshua D Rothman, "To Be Freed from Thate Curs and Let at Liberty," Interracial Adultery and Divorce in Antebellum Virginia, *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 106, no. 4 (Autumn, 1998): 476-481.

womanhood" to defend themselves. After all, most judges would be far more willing to rule in favor of a demure, virtuous, high-class model of womanhood than an immodest, bold woman whose low conduct could be blamed for her husband's philandering. But perhaps the words also suggest a completely opposite reason for their husbands' infidelity: too *little* passion rather than too much, too affectionate a demeanor rather than too ardent, and too virtuous rather than too exciting a wife. Perhaps the disconnect lay with the husband's dissatisfaction with the "cult of true womanhood," and his preference for the sexuality and ardor of a non-white woman whose passions made him consider her more his equal.

Such a preference became suspiciously prevalent in literature, too. Rose Maddox, an ex-slave interviewed in the 1930s, remembered that, before the Civil War, "a white man laid a nigger gal whenever he wanted her. Seems like some of them had a plumb craving for the other color."[71] Such a "craving" appeared time and time again in literature featuring "fancies" or *placées*. In almost every story, the primary love story involved a white man and a mixed-race black woman.

[71] Jack and Rose Maddox, interviewed in Rawick, *The American Slave*, Supplement, Series 2, 7: 2531.

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"Our Love Shall Bridge This Horrid Gulph" The "Tragic Mulatta" in Antebellum Literature[1]

In the early nineteenth century, a new kind of literary figure became so fascinating to the reading public that she began appearing in a large variety of poems, novels, and plays of all genres, in almost every region of America. Arriving first in the 1820s, she became a stock character in almost all literature concerning slavery, appearing in bestsellers from *The Last of the Mohicans* to *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* and continuing to proliferate even after the Civil War. In 1937, Sterling Brown first labeled this figure the "tragic mulatto," which another literary scholar later wrote was "probably the oldest archetype in our literature."[2]

While male versions of the "tragic mulatto" were also very prevalent, it was the female character who was usually the main protagonist. After all, mixed-race black men were generally distrusted in American society: their sex, and their drops of superior white blood, made them potentially threatening competition. On the other hand, mixed-race black women were not only acknowledged to be beautiful and fascinating, they also engaged in sexual relations with white men with relative impunity. The extent of this practice, the fame surrounding women like the New Orleans quadroons, and a growing debate about slavery made increasing numbers of writers turn to the "tragic mulatta" as an ideal type of Juliet in a mixed-race love story that flirted with social taboos, suggested social change, and hinted at society's unresolved sexual tensions.

To a modern reader, the stories featuring "tragic mulattas" are almost humorously repetitive. The woman is always exceptionally beautiful, and "mulatta" is actually a misnomer: more often, she is only one fourth, one eighth, or even one sixteenth black. For this reason, this dissertation will refer to "tragic mulattas" either by their literary designation, or with the same term that had been used to refer to all varieties of significant black and white mixture: quadroon. The usual "tragic mulatta" literary formula—at least, the one most studied by scholars—goes like this: the quadroon is almost always born into supposed freedom, the daughter of a white man and his adored, mixed-race slave concubine. The death of her white father then occasions the shocking revelation that some combination of laziness, oversight, or shame prevented her father from ever officially freeing her black mother. Apparently as careless with his money as he was of his beloved family, the father is revealed to have been profoundly in debt. When the inevitably greasy, grotesque creditors come to his estate, they inform his terrified daughter of her slave status and immediately consign her to the auction block. From there, the "tragic mulatta's" exceptional beauty, grace, education, piety and chastity strike the heart of a handsome, white purchaser. He sets her up in an idyllic cabin, usually festooned with fantastically beautiful

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[1] The title of this chapter is derived from a quote in Captain Mayne Reid's *The Quadroon,* in which the white hero declares in defiance of the social strictures keeping him from a union with his enslaved quadroon lover, "Alas! This horrid gulph—this social abyss that yawns between us. Well! It cannot separate souls. Our love shall bridge it—Ha!" Captain Mayne Reid, *The Quadroon: or, A Lover's Adventures in Louisiana* (New York: Robert M De Witt, 1856), 222.

[2] Brown, *The Negro in American Fiction*, 145; Catherine J. Starke, *Black Portraiture in American Fiction*: *Stock Characters, Archetypes, and Individuals* **(**New York: Basic Books, 1971), 47.

flowers that the woman's own, warm spirit nourishes, and they enjoy several years of romantic bliss. The "tragic mulatta" loves her rescuer with an ardor and selflessness that appears to consume her entire world, which rarely contains anyone besides her husband, child, and flowers. Nonetheless, the political and financial ambitions of her white lover usually lead him to take a white wife, whose paleness, frailty, and frigidity are almost always emphasized in relation to her "dusky" counterpart. The jealousy of the white wife, the heartbreak of the "tragic mulatta," the death of her lover, or her own sacrifice to save his life, tend to consign her to a beautiful death, and she is mourned by readers as superior in all ways to both white characters.

Many authors, of course, deviated in a number of ways from this standard plot, but most chose to structure their stories with the same, basic threads. The "tragic mulatta" is always beautiful, virtuous, educated, accomplished, and possesses all of the qualities of "true womanhood." She is, moreover, always desperately in love with her white man, willing to sacrifice herself entirely for his happiness. Finally, she is, without exception, the most admirable female character in the books, always outshining her insipid, frail, jealous, cruel, or simply uninteresting white counterpart. Although the author often brings the interracial affair to a safe end by killing her, he cannot do so without also ruining her white lover, subjecting him to death by heartbreak or dissipation, and often leaving his white wife a cold, loveless widow. Such an ending must have appeared so tragic and unjust to many audiences that a number of authors began to offer happy endings, suggesting such astonishing conclusions as legalized interracial marriage and blacks "passing" into white society.[3]

Historians and literary scholars have suggested a number of reasons for the popularity of the "tragic mulatta," and for the repetitive nature of her past, character traits, and storyline. One major theory concerns her most frequent appearances in anti-slavery novels: because of her white blood, beauty, and obvious adherence to the "cult of true womanhood," she was a more pitiable figure to white audiences than a fully black figure. This, Sterling Brown writes, was "a concession, unconscious, perhaps, to race snobbishness even among abolitionists."[4] The fact that she, her friends, and most of her family were so often unaware of her black blood must also have inspired fear as well as pity in white readers; if racial mixing in the South was so prevalent and certain slaves so very light-skinned, what was to prevent future kidnappings of *truly* white people? Female audiences especially, would have understood the terrible fear of a sudden reversal of fortune that left them with no male protector, abandoned in a society in which they were cast as frail dependents.[5]

Another theory concerns a second aspect of the abolitionist agenda: the revelation of Southern promiscuity. The degradation, evil, excess, and sexual impropriety occasioned by slavery was a favorite claim of northern abolitionists claiming moral superiority. As literary scholar Jules Zanger writes, "the very existence of the ["tragic mulatta"] convicted the slaveholder of prostituting his slaves and of selling his own children for profit."[6] The lighter her skin color, the more the evidence pointed to multiple generations of interracial mixing—which, of course, connoted rape, adultery, concubinage, and sexual deviance.

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[3] These descriptions of stock characters, traits, plots and endings have been drawn from my extensive reading of the novels that will be analyzed in this chapter. They are also detailed in: Zanger, "The Tragic Octoroon," 63—64.
[4] Brown, *The Negro in American Fiction*, 45. See also Zanger, "The Tragic Octoroon," 64—66; Hugh M. Gloster, *Negro Voices in American Fiction* (Chapel Hill, N.C, 1948), 12, 17.
[5] Zanger, "The Tragic Octoroon," 67.
[6] Ibid., 66.

All of these interpretations are certainly important aspects of the literature, and essential devices of an author's political and moral agenda. Yet in focusing primarily on the "tragic mulatta's" appearance in northern, abolitionist fiction, literary scholars often overlook her various appearances in other regions and genres in the decades before slavery became so hotly contested. The "tragic mulatta" figure was a quintessentially American character, and as such she appeared on the scene at the very moment American novels began to proliferate. Only some two hundred works of fiction had been produced from 1779 to 1829, and James Fenimore Cooper was the best known American novelist of the time. His remarkable heroine, Cora Munroe, was the first "tragic mulatta" figure to appear in American fiction, in his exceptionally popular 1826 novel, *The Last of the Mohicans.*[7] Cooper's popularity, as well as his readers' professed adoration of Cora, most likely inspired other writers to copy details of her character.

The southern plantation novelists, who began writing in the 1820s, used the "tragic mulatta" figure surprisingly often. Whether this was because they decided to address an obvious and public topic, or whether they were drawn to the Romeo and Juliet-type romance, they managed to put a pro-slavery spin on the story. Some southern writers excused the situation by placing it in a different time period, like French-ruled New Orleans, or by making the "tragic mulatta's" lover a foreigner. Southern authors invited readers to sympathize with the quadroon character, whom they provided with all the virtues possessed by whites in the "cult of true womanhood," but they blamed her misfortunes on particular, evil-minded individuals rather than on the institution of slavery itself. In Mrs. E.D.E.N Southworth's novel *Retribution,* for example, the tragic mulatta Minnie's white master is responsible for saving her from degradation at the New Orleans auction block and restoring her to her white, French husband. In Charles Peacock's *The Creole Orphans,* the white character Charles Ormond's love for his quadroon mistress, Marie, is actually portrayed as an edifying aspect of slavery. Though he claims to abhor miscegenation and admits disgust of Marie's black blood, his intense love for a character whose "white" appearance and virtues are practically hammered into the reader's consciousness vindicates his actions. Since the two men who eventually pursue Marie's children with the evil intentions of enslavement are actually Yankees, the story's ambiguous message is that benevolent slavery can actually lead to loving, "whitening" relationships between Southern whites and blacks. In fact, *The Creole Orphans,* as well as at least one other southern novel, J.H Ingraham's *The Quadroon,* end with a definitive "whitening:" the quadroons in the novel are revealed to have been white all along, due to a secret swap in their infancy. Such an ending therefore vindicates the white men for having loved their quadroons, and yet does not pretend that the reality of interracial attraction is impossible. After all, the interest of both the white lover and the reader is vested in a character believed by both from the beginning to be a quadroon—her final revelation as a white women only serves to remove the legal barriers around her.[8]

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[7] Ibid., 36—39.

[8] Ibid., 36—66. The following analysis will include a few books in which the quadroon woman is, at the end, revealed to be white. However, I do not believe that this affects my analysis, which, after all, is geared toward the reader's expectations and interpretations of the character. I argue that, despite their ultimate whiteness, the characters *are* nonetheless "tragic mulattas" because they are believed by the reader and the other characters to be so throughout the majority of the novel. As such, they are given the same, classic appearances, character traits, and underlying sexuality/sensuality as the "true" quadroon characters. Furthermore, as they undergo similar degradation, sale, and sexual harassment, their experiences also make them "tragic mulattas." Finally, though they are "white," they are often not of pure, Anglo-Saxon descent, which further complicates their racial status. They are often described as Mediterranean, Creole, or Moorish. In any case, the novels that ultimately established the whiteness of

Clearly, abolitionism was not the only purpose behind the "tragic mulatta" figure, and her use as a pro-slavery trope was also shaky and flawed. Although Northerners used the figure in a few literary works prior to the 1850s, it appears that the Fugitive Slave Act and the subsequent escalation of the slavery issue catalyzed a virtual cascade of interracial dramas.[9] Nonetheless, although many of these books admitted to having political agendas, others claimed only to entertain. Clearly, something else was at play, something that could take on a political angle but was primarily directed at the demands of the reading public. I argue that literary scholars have overlooked an essential aspect of the "tragic mulatta:' her blatant desirability and superiority to every white, female character. Even those authors who doggedly advanced their abolitionist messages continued to utilize suspicious stereotypes that had characterized the "tragic mulatta" decades before she took on a political dimension. Whether described in 1826 or in 1865, her beauty was always sexual, characterized by a voluptuousness and passion that contrasted starkly with the frail frigidity of even the most likeable white women. Furthermore, in the contest that inevitably developed between herself and a white woman, the "tragic mulatta" was unfailingly the victor—even if her death made the triumph a tragedy. Such a plotline not only suggests a decades-long, geographically prevalent "crisis of femininity," but also the romantic fantasy—apparent in both the North *and* South—of a world in which racial mixing was legal and the right combination of white *and* black blood could make a woman the ideal wife.

"They are of that beauty which you benighted Northerners little dream of"[10]

Appearance

A "tragic mulatta" never received less than half a paragraph—and sometimes multiple pages—rhapsodizing about her exceptional beauty. While many literary scholars have claimed that authors emphasized her whiteness, this is misleading: almost every single "tragic mulatta" was described as being decidedly darker than fully white women, whether in a way that clearly marked her African origins or that ambiguously compared her to a woman of "Mediterranean" origins. Indeed, her complexion was usually the first thing authors chose to detail, in terms connoting warmth and fertility, flowers and fruits, and a voluptuous, blooming ripeness. "The delicate damask on that cheek," gushes the Spanish nobleman Henrique to his adored quadroon lover in Ingraham's *The Quadroone, "*the sun, in ripening, hath just browned, like a rare peach." Lydia Maria Child writes that Xarifa, her own quadroon heroine, has a complexion "rich and glowing as an autumnal leaf. . . . scarcely deeper than the sunny side of a golden pear," and Peacock's Marie in *The Creole Orphans* has cheeks "with a slight ripe tinge of carnation, such as the peach obtains by exposure to the sun's rays." Indeed, many authors proclaimed that their quadroon heroine's skin color was far more gorgeous than that of white women. Maum Guinea, in Mrs. Victor's *Maum Guinea's Plantation Children,* asserts that her quadroon child had "skin handsomer dan any white chile's could be—a sort of brown, not dark, rich and smooth and velvety, wid de red in her cheeks like peaches." The Yankee character Talbot in *The Creole Orphans* writes his friend Mr. Stamp that the quadroon girls he lusts for "are of that beauty

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their "tragic mulatta" characters were quite few. Those analyzed in this dissertation are: Joseph Holt Ingraham, *The Quadroone; Or, St. Michael's Day* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841); Mary Langdon, *Ida May; A Story of Things Actual and Possible* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Company, 1855); James Peacocke, *The Creole Orphans: or, Lights and Shadows of Southern Life: A Tale of Louisiana* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1856).

[9] Kinney, *Amalgamation!,* 51—56.

[10] Peacocke, *The Creole Orphans,* 119.

which you benighted Northerners little dream of . . . the olive and rose struggling for the mastery in their cheeks."[11]

What set a quadroon's appearance apart even more than her skin color, however, was the sexual way in which she was inevitably described. While white women in almost every "tragic mulatta" novel were carefully accorded respectful portrayals, authors appeared to revel in descriptions of quadroons' overtly sensual figures and features. The quadroon heroine in Van Buren Denslow's novel *Owned and Disowned* has "rich, pouting lips" that are bright "red" and "tempting," and "large, sparkling eyes of an irresistibly melting softness" that are "black, lustrous, and passionate." The quadroon servant Filippa in Augustine Duganne's "The Bravo's Daughter" has "large, sleepy eyes, fringed with long lashes," "a voluptuous-looking mouth, and teeth dazzlingly white, like little pearls."[12] The quadroon's teeth appear to have been of a particular fascination to authors and characters alike; both often compared them to glimmering jewels, as though they wished to probe into the "rich" mouths to retrieve them.

The alluring contours of a quadroon's mouth were often accompanied by titillating illustrations of her body, which was just as "ripe" as the rest of her. Julia in *Owned and Disowned* is proclaimed to have a "finely moulded and voluptuously graceful form," and Emilie in *The American Lounger* has "a superb neck and bust." In a scene that, due to literary conventions, likely would not have taken place if the lady was white, the narrator of *A Lover's Adventure in Louisiana* joyously describes the way orange harvesting caused a pleasing jiggling in his quadroon lover's lush form. "The exercise of shaking down the oranges," he remembers, made " her full bosom r[ise] and f[all] with her excited breathing, and the light wrapper she wore enabled me to trace the noble outlines of her form," which "exhibited an undulating motion . . . . She was large and womanly, yet of perfect proportion." Such graceful movement was attributed to the black blood these women possessed, which apparently gave their bodies a form and motion so sensual that its exoticism was immediately recognizable. The quadroon Rose in *Maum Guinea,* for example, is described as having "that indescribable grace, which no thoroughly Caucasian blood could ever emulate," and which "pervaded every movement and curve of her form." While always explained as elegant and admirable rather than promiscuous, a quadroon's "grace" was therefore seen to be an irrefutable indicator of her passionate, sexual nature. In *The Creole Orphans,* for example, Charles Ormond's beloved quadroon mistress and quasi-wife, Marie, has a form "of that voluptuous, flowing mould, whose every action is grace," and which "expressed the deep, yet hidden fires, which burned within a shrine as pure as a vestal's."[13]

Even if a quadroon was dressed in carefully concealing clothing, and even if the jealous attentions of a white mistress deprived her of luxurious hair or fashionable clothing, her passionate sensuality was thought to be always recognizable in her eyes. In Victorian literature

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[11] Ingraham, *The Quadroone,* 45; Lydia Maria Child, "The Quadroons," in *Fact and Fiction: a Collection of Stories* (New York: C.S. Francis & Co., 1846), 63, 71.; Metta V. Victor, *Maum Guinea and Her Plantation "Children;" or, Holiday-Week on a Louisiana Estate: A Slave Romance* (New York: Beadle and Company, 1861), 153; Peacocke, *The Creole Orphans,* 134, 119.

[12] Van Buren Denslow, *Owned and Disowned: The Chattel Child, a Tale of Southern Life* (New York: H. Dayton, 1857), 57; Augustine J.H. Duganne, "The Bravo's Daughter, or, The Tory of Carolina: A Romance of the American Revolution," in *Gazette of the Union: The Golden Rule, Old Fellow's Family Companion,* ed. J.R. Crampton (New York: J. D. Stewart & W. B. Smith, Publishers, 1849), 10: 166.

[13] Denslow, *Owned and Disowned,* 38; Joseph Holt Ingraham, *The American Lounger, or, Tales, Sketches, and Legends Gathered in Sundry Journeyings* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1839)
258. Reid, *The Quadroon,* 210-211; Victor, *Maum Guinea,* 44; Peacocke, *The Creole Orphans,* 10.

especially, the eyes were seen as the "windows to the soul:" a character's true nature and intentions could almost always be divined and foreshadowed by a brief description of them.[14] It was in the delineations of a quadroon's eyes that her ambiguous nature emerged. Authors seemed torn between depicting her as sensuous yet innocent, voluptuous yet chaste, passionate yet angelic. After all, she was intended to have enough white blood to make her truly virtuous, pious, gentle and loving, but some hint needed to be given of the sexual depths that lurked within—the "deep, yet hidden fires, which burned within a shrine as pure as a vestal's."[15] Eyes, then, were the means by which authors assured their readers of the hot, black blood stirring within a graceful, respectable exterior. A quadroon mistress of a South Carolina planter in Langdon's *Ida May* has "eyes full of passion" reflecting a "heart of fire," and Azelie in Ingraham's *The Quadroon* has "glorious dark eyes filled with witchery." In Ingraham's *American Lounger,* the French baron who falls in love with the quadroon Emilie is positively ensnared by her "large-orbed, jet-black eyes, that seemed to float in lakes of liquid languor." Although her exterior is the epitome of beauty and grace, and although he first sees her in a Catholic cathedral, proving her devout piety, he confesses that in her eyes he saw "an expression . . . strange and indefinable; . . . as if a serpent had been looking through the eyes of a gazelle. Dark fires burned deeply within, and the intensest passion there slumbered." The French baron gazes into them "with sensations such as a woman's eye had never before created in his bosom," and later tells his friend, a New Orleans native, of their "basilisk fascination." His friend knowingly informs him that this is "the mark of the quadroon even to the sixth generation, when all other signs of her African descent are lost." It is, the friend confides, the proof of the wild spirit within, unquashed by the addition of white blood. "We often speak of the fine eye of a spirited woman as having a little devil in it," he explains, and "in the eye of the quadroon there lurks the devil." Lest the enamored baron suppose that this made quadroons dangerous or savage, the friend goes on to assure him that "they show none of [the devil] in their dispositions. They are warm hearted and full of passion, and fire, but it is difficult to rouse them to anger." They are, in fact, "universally affectionate, good-natured." In other words, the "devil" in the quadroon lay coiled deeply within her sexual nature, to be roused in love and, one assumes, sex, but otherwise quiescent.[16]

The drop of black blood in a quadroon therefore tinted her skin a deep, warm color, added enticing curves to her figure, puffed her lips to an inviting fullness, gave her a provocative kind of "grace," and infused her eyes with a spiritual fire. It also enabled authors to place their quadroon characters in remarkably sexual positions, even to the extent of stripping them naked. Authors usually provided marginal protection by insisting on the quadroon's innocence and describing her pathetic attempts to conceal her body, but readers were nonetheless invited to watch her sexual exposure. In *Neighbor Jackwood,* for example, the author invites the reader to gaze at the quadroon Charlotte's breast—which is inadvertently exposed by her disarrayed dress—before he even describes her face. Edmund Kirke's *My Southern Friends* is even more blatantly sexual. By bringing his narrator to the slave market and subjecting him to the coarse talk of a lascivious slave trader, the reader is invited to simultaneously condemn yet observe the sale of beautiful mulatto women. "Luk at thet!" the slave trader cries, as he throws the woman's dress up "to her knees, while the poor girl reached down her shackled hands in the vain effort to

[14] Rabinowitz, *Before Reading,* 88.
[15] Peacocke, *The Creole Orphans,* 10.
[16] Langdon, *Ida May,* 35; Ingraham, *The Quadroon,* 67; Ingraham, *The American Lounger,* 258-262.

prevent the indignity." He proclaims her "good at breedin'" and says "Ye kin *****." The asterisks, the author explains, symbolize the parts "of this discourse [that] will not bear repeating." Although the narrator proclaims that "the cool bestiality of the trader disgusted me" and that his exhibitions were "disgraceful even to describe," he not only remains at the market to see more women, but details further spectacles. The trader finds a quadroon woman whose dress he proceeds to wrap tightly around her in order to show off her voluptuous contours. "I want ter show ye she's sound's a nut," he says, "Look a' thar, now,' and with a quick, dexterous movement, he tore open the front of her dress." The author interjects with his suggestive "*****," which we suppose stands for a description of the girl's exposed breasts. The reader only sees—or imagines seeing, through the narrator's eyes—the breasts for a moment, before "the poor girl, unable to use her hands, ben[ds] over nearly double" to hide them.[17]

Such sexual exhibitions hardly ever appeared in antebellum literary portrayals of white women, but a quadroon's black blood apparently left her as few literary as legal protections.[18] Nonetheless, quadroons were almost always portrayed as being totally innocent of these sexual designs, and adamant about protecting their chastity. A kind of virgin/whore dichotomy thus emerges from the literature, in which conflicting images of the quadroon as pious, chaste and holy compete with portrayals of her sensuousness and sexual availability. In Longfellow's poem "The Quadroon Girl," for example, the quadroon girl who is bought as a concubine is described as being totally naked above the waist, "No garment she wore save a kirtle bright/ And her own long, raven hair." Nonetheless, the next stanza calls her "As holy, meek, and faint/As lights in some cathedral aisle/The features of a saint." Zoe, the title character of Elizabeth Livermore's *Zoe: or the Quadroon's Triumph,* "presented so perfect a picture" of this dichotomy that her "luxurious, dreamy, passionate orientalism," is "redeemed from its sensuous character by the pure Madonna-like expression which was natural to it."[19]

Even when described as spiritual and holy, quadroon characters were given a warmth and earthiness that tied them firmly to the terrestrial realm. In contrast, many white women in the "tragic mulatta" tales were described as being so pale as to be virtually bloodless, so tiny and frail they were compared to children or fairies, and so sexless and angelic that they belonged more to the heavenly than earthly realm. Their appearances ranged from being feeble, childlike, and almost impossibly pure to icy, untouchably elegant, and more like statues than living women. They were almost always presented as foils to the quadroon women: fair when the other was dark, frail when she was voluptuous, cool when she was warm, and spiritual when she was earthly. Quite often, the two women were presented as half-sisters, one fully white and the other partly black.

This comparison was first presented in Cooper's major bestseller, *The Last of the Mohicans.* Two sisters, Cora and Alice, are traveling to an American fort during the French and Indian War. Along the way, they are pursued and captured by Indians, and the plot follows their trials and eventual rescue. Even before the reader is made aware of Cora's quadroon status (her

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[17] J.T. Trowbridge, *Neighbor Jackwood* (Boston: Lothrop, Lee &Shepard Company, 1857), 41; Edmund Kirke, *My Southern Friends* (New York: Carleton, Publisher, 1863), 71-72.

[18] Certain publications were an exception. The "Flash Press," for example, often published extremely sexual stories, filled with "heaving white bosoms," in their papers. However, unlike "tragic mulatta" literature, these stories were not intended for the general reading public. See Cohen, Gilfoyle, and Horowitz, *The Flash Press.*

[19] Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Quadroon Girl," in *The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: Early Poems* (1853; repr., London: Grant Richards, 1903), 1: 41. Elizabeth D. Livermore, *Zoe: Or, the Quadroon's Triumph* (Cincinnati: Truman and Spofford, 1855), 163.

father was married to a West Indian mulatto), she is acknowledged as the more beautiful, interesting, and admirable sister. Her shining black hair is compared to the magnificent "plumage of the raven," and her complexion "appeared charged with the color of the rich blood that seemed ready to burst its bounds." She is "noble-minded," "dignified," "ardent, high-souled and generous" with "dark, kindling eyes." Her younger sister Alice, on the other hand, has golden hair, blue eyes, and a "dazzling" white complexion. She is childlike, "dovelike," and frail, with a face of "sweet innocence," "piety," and "dependence." When, at one point, she faints against a tree, she is described as a "beautiful emblem of the wounded delicacy of her sex, devoid of animation and yet keenly conscious." Her ardent admirer, the British soldier Duncan, proclaims that "her soul is pure and spotless as her skin."[20]

The same comparison of white innocence and dark sensuality is used even more pointedly in Van Buren Denslow's *Owned and Disowned.* The plot is faintly similar to *The Last of the Mohicans,* in that a white father (this time a Southerner) is raising his quadroon and white daughters as sisters, and both are involved in a kidnapping scheme—this time with pirates. As with Cora and Alice, Julia (the quadroon daughter) is acknowledged to be superior in courage and intellect to her white sister Ada, and the descriptions of her appearance seem similarly biased. At one point, the author even places them together at a mirror, comparing their faces in the reflection.

> The voluptuous loveliness of the Creole,[21] mingling, perhaps, with the pride of the Spanish and the grace of the French, combined in Julia with the mentality of the American; while Ada's golden hair, and pale, slightly tinged cheek, blue eye and slender, fairy form shone with the pearl-like fairness of the Saxon. But there was in her delicate and childish features an infantile prettiness, which contrasted with the dignified intellectuality of her sister, and compared with her, she seemed like a doll-like, though lovely creature, whom no years could change from child to woman. Such doubtless are sent to earth like flowers and cloud-tints, only to gratify our taste and love for the beautiful and pure.[22]

Such a contrast is quite blatantly in favor of the earthly, womanly Julia over the "doll-like," evanescent Ada, who is so clearly sexless that "no years could change [her] from child to woman."

Perhaps because conventions dictated that ideal white women be portrayed as innocent, dependent, pious and chaste rather than bold, wise, ardent and sensual, or perhaps because the authors truly intended to steer the reader's attraction to the darker-skinned woman, almost all depictions of white women in the "tragic mulatta" literature were sexless. Louise Arnoult, the white heroine of Duganne's "The Bravo's Daughter," "united in her features and person the charming simplicity of a child." Her form was slight and "not voluptuou[s], but with a "symmetry, which we admire so much in the angelic creations of a Guido's or a Raffael's

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[20] James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826; repr., New York : Bantam Books, 1989), 11, 63, 366, 393, 68, 86, 120, 126, 300, 367.

[21] Many nineteenth-century writers used the word "Creole" to refer to those of mixed French or Spanish and African descent. While the term no longer carries the connotation of mixed-blood, it was often understood by contemporary, nineteenth-century readers to refer to interracial parentage. In *Owned and Disowned,* Julia is variously referred to as a "quadroon" or a "Creole."

[22] Denslow, *Owned and Disowned,* 43.

genius." The other white girl in the story, Alice, echoes Ada's description, being altogether too pure for the world: she is of a "strange unearthly loveliness . . . [that] cannot remain long upon earth—that has no affinity with mortal things." Charlotte, the white wife Lydia Maria Child's slaveholder marries to fulfill his ambitions despite his love for his quadroon mistress, is "inferior in beauty" to the quadroon Rosalie. Charlotte has "blue eyes [that] were gentle, though inexpressive."[23]

At their best, then, white women in the "tragic mulatta" stories were compared to angels, doves, children or fairies. These are the women who, like Cooper's Alice and Duganne's Louise Arnoult, were allowed a happy ending of marriage or who, like Denslow's Ada or Duganne's Alice, were doomed to tragically beautiful deaths. At their worst, however, white women were depicted as cold, calculating and selfish perversions of the "southern belle" ideal, whose jealousy and ambition wrecked the happiness of the other characters. Philippa, in Elizabeth Stoddard's *Two Men,* detests the quadroon Charlotte for having stolen the love of her life, her foster-brother Parke. Yet Charlotte's warm, languid beauty contrasts starkly with Philippa's severe, icy features, "her thin lips [and] her clear, cold eyes" that "were like the tinted iceberg, which rides towards its fall in the summer sea." Maum Guinea in *Maum Guinea's Plantation Children* recalls Mrs. Dudley, the white wife her adored master and lover abandoned her for, as being "pale, with gold colored hair and very delicate features," that were altogether "too quiet and cold—she hadn't no color nor sparkle 'bout her." Her blue eyes, moreover, were "cold and sharp as steel." Mabel, the white woman in *Ida May* who briefly ensnares the heart of the white slave-owner Walter before he falls truly, deeply in love with the quadroon Ida, is supposed to be the epitome of white, southern female beauty. Nonetheless, she, too, is described in cold, lifeless terms. Her eyes are a "celestial blue," her complexion of "alabaster purity," and her face and figure "so purely statuesque" that "she was like a living, breathing piece of sculpture." At their most beautiful, then, whether they were childlike and ethereal or statuesque and icy, white women were fundamentally untouchable.[24]

"Dark fires burned deeply within, and the intensest passion there slumbered"[25]

Character and Sexuality

Since appearance was considered a fundamental aspect of race, and since race was thought to play an essential role in the formation of character, a quadroon's sensuous, passionate appearance was always directly related to her personality. As Zoe, the quadroon protagonist of Livermore's *Zoe, or the Octoroon's Triumph* cries out in desperation at her white boarding school, where she feels she does not fit in,

> It is all good enough for white people, but why won't they allow that I can be different! Was I not born in the burning tropics, where the sun shines all the year with fervor as well as light, and down deep in my soul there is a thirst which no water of earth has yet slaked, and in my brain is a flame which perpetually burns, writing like a serpent after

[23] Duganne, "The Bravo's Daughter," 109, 181; Child, "The Quadroons," 65.
[24] Elizabeth Stoddard, *Two Men* (1865; repr., Philadelphia: Henry T Coates & Co, 1901), 58; Victor, *Maum Guinea,* 151; Langdon, *Ida May,* 137, 375.
[25] Ingraham, *The American Lounger,* 258.

> the stream that would quench it; and in my heart, O my poor heart! A loud cry rending me for the love that would lull it to sleep.[26]

Just as a quadroon's appearance was a mix of the virginal and the provocative, her character was thought to be a mixture of meekness and passion, innocence and ardor. In general, a quadroon character was initially presented as a docile, obedient, and virtuous young woman whose brave passions and ardent, selfless devotion were awakened by her love for a white man. This love, as Zoe explains, is the "stream that would quench" the "writhing serpent" within her. Moreover, a quadroon's love is not, as Peacocke explains in *The Creole Orphans,* "that refined and sentimental love, which poets in their moon-struck fancies prate about, but . . . that warm and generous passion such as children of the tropics feel." Interestingly, besides being portrayed as more sensuous and capable of "generous passion" than white women, quadroons were also occasionally presented as intellectually superior. Cooper's quadroon heroine Cora, for example, is "noble-minded and wise," while her younger sister Alice is a rather simple, "artless but ardent enthusiast." Cora's own father charges her with the duty of protecting her guileless sister, telling her to remember that "on your presence of mind and ingenuity even your life, as well as that of Alice, may in some measure depend." The quadroon Julia in *Owned and Disowned,* whose relationship with her half-sister Ada was described so similarly to that of Cora and Alice, is preferred by the white Mr. Defoe because his time with her evidences "a fitness of thought and a congeniality of soul." White Ada, on the other hand, has only "an infantile prettiness, which contrasted with the dignified intellectuality of her sister."[27]

More often, however, a quadroon's elegance, manners, and marvelous domestic skills were praised. These, of course, were emphasized as attributes that would make her a suitable household mistress. On the one hand, her white blood was thought to provide her with domestic and social refinement. In her short story "The Quadroons," for example, Lydia Maria Child explains that New Orleans' quadroon mistresses were specifically raised to be "highly cultivated in mind and manners." On the other hand, the traditional association of light-skinned slaves with domestic work appears to have also influenced the quadroon stereotype: almost all quadroons in the literature were portrayed as hard workers, caring nurses, excellent housemaids, and wonderful cooks. Ironically, this was often mentioned in contrast to white southern women, who appear to have been stereotyped—at least by northern writers—as lazy and frail. Adela Roland, the title character of *Adela the Quadroon,* is "unlike many southern ladies of gentle birth" because she "united with great beauty an appearance of strong and ruddy health." Furthermore, "to the accomplishments and refinements of a thorough education, she added, what is seldom found in southern women, a perfect familiarity with the domestic duties of the household." Unlike southern ladies, many of whom were thought to relegate all chores and even the running of their households to their most capable slaves, Adela "superintended everything within doors, and was as busy as a bee." Even in the North, a quadroon's domestic abilities were supposed to be particularly noticeable. Charlotte in *Neighbor Jackwood,* for example, is a quadroon who has escaped to New England. Even among the inheritors of the "Protestant work ethic," Charlotte is

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[26] Livermore, *The Quadroon's Triumph,* 112.

[27] Peacocke, *The Creole Orphans,* 13; Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans,* 110; Denslow, *Owned and Disowned,* 53, 41.

praised for having beautiful manners, irreproachable piety, and a natural ability with domestic chores. She is, Neighbor Jackwood's wife remarks, "about the handiest girl 't ever I see."[28]

According to the literature, quadroon women not only ensured that their lovers' households were cozy, domestic havens, they were also affectionate, adoring partners. While a white wife raised in high society (especially a "southern belle") might be expected to express discontent, make demands, or exhibit profligate spending habits, quadroons were reported to be perpetually content. "They are . . . universally affectionate, good-natured, and remarkable for a . . . simplicity of manners," the visiting French baron in *The American Lounger* is informed by his New Orleans friend, Mr. Beranger.[29] After all, quadroons, unlike white women, could not *expect* to be loved and provided for by their white lovers; they only lived in hope of their generosity.

Most importantly, quadroons were thought to love their white men ardently and selflessly. In the literature, this was attributed partly to the fact that the white men were always their saviors, rescuing them from the auction block, poverty, or lascivious white villains, and partly to their inherently loving natures. Furthermore, because of their degraded positions, they were almost always willing to accept any role their white lover created for them. According to Mr. Beranger in Ingraham's *The American Lounger,* they

> look forward to the station of a mistress with the same hopes, fears, and sensations that a virtuously educated maiden contemplates that of a wife. In fact, to their perverted minds, illicit love is divested of guilt, and is connected neither with shame nor moral degradation.[30]

Unlike white women, then, who were supposed to jealously guard their emotions and chastity until marriage, a quadroon was expected to be far freer with her affections, though by no means a prostitute. According to the literature, a quadroon's temperament was so warm and generous that, once she gave her heart to a man, she required nothing from him in return—neither a legitimate marriage nor even a promise of constancy. In Ingraham's *The Quadroone,* for example, the Spanish Count Osma is surprised by the marital views of Ninine, the mother of his intended quadroon mistress. Ninine dismisses the fact that New Orleans law forbids interracial marriage by bluntly stating that quadroons do not need it. "A woman's honour lieth in the constancy of her love," she explains, and not in a required marriage ceremony. "Never was a quadroone maiden known to be false to her lord," she insists, and while a white "wife's honour may be fortified by fear; a quadroone's is by love."[31] Clearly, such romanticism was intended to fulfill white male fantasies: the ownership of a woman's body and soul without troublesome legal strings or even requited feelings.

If, as suggested by a number of contemporaries, many American men were disillusioned with marriage, the "tragic mulatta" literature insisted that a quadroon mistress brought none of the disadvantages a white wife could impose. In *Clotel,* when the title character's white lover "playfully" asks her how she could keep him if he wished to "run away," she replies with perfect seriousness that "if the mutual love we have for each other, and the dictates of your own

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[28] Child, "The Quadroons," 62; H.L. Hosmer, *Adela The Octoroon* (Columbus, Ohio: Folett, Foster &Co., 1860), 4; Trowbridge, *Neighbor Jackwood,* 50; For the color division between field and domestic work, see Johnson, *Soul by Soul,* 152.

[29] Ingraham, *The American Lounger,* 261-262.

[30] Ibid., 263.

[31] Ingraham, *The Quadroon,* 65.

conscience, do not cause you to remain my husband, and your affections fall from me, I would not, if I could, hold you by a single fetter." When Philippa, the white woman in Stoddard's *Two Men*, jealously confronts her beloved foster brother's quadroon lover, the latter mildly tells her "He came after me, remember. I never asked anything of him. I never shall. . . . I act according to his wishes. He governs me." Such meek obedience is totally opposite to Philippa's own, demanding character, which of course suggests that it is the very reason her foster brother chose the quadroon in the first place. While white women were taught to view marriage in terms of social advantage, quadroons, who could not aspire to it at all, were thought to be unquestioningly adoring. The white hero Hector in *Neighbor Jackwood* complains that "the principle use of [white women's] ears seems to be to catch the answer to the important question '*What will the world say?'"* and to "subordinate all their motives and aspirations to a low matrimonial ambition." Quadroons, on the other hand, were thought to love unconditionally. Azelie in Ingraham's *The Quadroon,* for example, insists to her beloved Spanish cavalier that "love hath no name or rank!" and that "if I were a princess, loving thee as I do, I should not cease to love thee shouldst thou prove to be a—slave! Nay, a bandit of the forests or a pirate of the seas."[32] The legal impossibility of marriage, combined, it would seem, with their naturally ardent spirits, thus made "tragic mulattas" quite radical romantics.

Such total devotion instilled the quadroons with a remarkable courage that might have appeared too bold and therefore unwomanly had it not always been directed toward their white lovers. The fugitive quadroon slave Charlotte in *Neighbor Jackwood* is pursued by slave-catchers who attempt to return her to the South under the Fugitive Slave Act. She hides in a haystack that is then set afire, but as the flames start to blaze she thinks of Hector and "for his sake . . . conquer[s] her agony. . . . [F]or him she would risk all things; for him she would suffer on; for him she would live!" When the quadroon Azelie's lover is attacked by the jealous, lascivious Spanish count who has been doggedly pursuing her in Ingraham's *The Quadroon,* she springs between them and stabs the attacker with a stiletto knife she carries secreted in the folds of her bosom. Many other authors equipped their quadroon heroines with small daggers, usually hidden between their breasts. Besides providing the reader titillation, the image implied an innate, admirable bravery, as well as the quadroon's acceptance of the dangers of her desirability.[33]

"Tragic mulattas" did not even require requited love in order to sacrifice themselves: the quadroon Filippa in Duganne's *The Bravo's Daughter* acts as her white owner Robert Atree's secret guardian angel. While he, ironically the plot's villain, schemes to kill a white woman's husband so he can marry her himself, his devoted quadroon slave dresses as a boy and follows him to keep him safe. Twice, when various men attempt to kill Atree in revenge for his treachery, Filippa leaps out of hiding to either shoot or stab them dead. She then quickly runs away into the darkness before Atree can discover her identity. Finally, after tricking a third would-be murderer into falling in love with her so that she can stab him while they are alone, her dying victim forces poison down her throat. Staggering to find Atree, she admits with her dying breath that she has saved him three times, and asks him to grant her last request of a kiss. With her final sigh, she breathes his name: "She had never revealed her love; but she had perished for her lover."[34]

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[32] Brown, *Clotel,* 79-80; Stoddard, *Two Men,* 186; Trowbridge, *Neighbor Jackwood,* 122; Ingraham, *The Quadroon,* 43-44.
[33] Trowbridge, *Neighbor Jackwood,* 308; Ingraham, *The Quadroon,* 77;
[34] Duganne, *The Bravo's Daughter,* 342, 389, 390.

Filippa is, however, an anomaly in the literature because of the murders she commits in order to save the man she loves. Most "tragic mulattas" only ever aimed their daggers and pistols at themselves. Perhaps because Sir Walter Scott made the scene of Rebecca's death threat so arresting in *Ivanhoe,* antebellum literature exhaustively copied the scenario. Just like Scott's Rebecca, "tragic mulattas" were almost always pursued by evil, lascivious white men who sought to possess them against their wills. As in Scott's famous scene between the captive Jewess and her kidnapper, Bois Guilbert, "tragic mulattas" made grand, defiant speeches threatening suicide over dishonor. In *The Quadroon,* for example, Azelie draws a stiletto (from her bosom, of course) against the evil Spanish count who buys her and attempts to assert his physical rights. "Approach me a step nearer, and thou wilt embrace a corpse for thy mistress," she cries. "[T]he grave is preferable to thy licentious love, and death shall stand between me and dishonor!" In *Neighbor Jackwood,* when Charlotte gets ahold of a dagger just as her detested pursuer, Robert, approaches her, "a wild impulse" seizes her, a "fire kindl[es] in her eye, and "for an instant she [is] a splendid savage." Instead of killing him, though, she later turns the dagger upon herself and cries "your approach will kill me!"[35] The quadroon's jealous guarding of her chastity was supposed to be an attribute of both her "white" virtue and her fierce loyalty to her white lover. The ideal quadroon, such depictions suggested, would consent to be possessed by no one but her white lover, and would die rather than be forced to share her body with another.

As a whole, however, the white male characters of "tragic mulatta" literature were appallingly disloyal to their quadroon lovers. In the classic prototype of the "tragic mulatta" story, they marry white wives after having promised their love to their quadroon mistresses. Interestingly, the quadroons rarely fault their masters for this—after all, they profess their intention to never hold them by a "single fetter"—but their noble characters cannot allow them to rob the white wives of their rights. For this reason, "tragic mulattas" rarely allow their white lovers to keep them as mistresses after they have contracted legitimate, white marriages. They often commit graceful suicides, relegating their white lovers to lives of guilt and regret. In Child's "The Quadroons," beautiful Rosalie finds "the conflicts of her spirit . . . too strong for the beautiful frame in which it dwelt. About a year after [her lover and master] Edward's marriage, she was found dead in her bed." Brown's Clotel, too, abandons her lover when he marries a white woman, since "hers was a passion too deep and absorbing to admit of partnership, and her spirit was too pure to form a selfish league with crime."[36] Sold into slavery by the jealous new wife, she eventually casts herself off a bridge in an attempt to escape the slave-catchers.

The "tragic mulatta," then, was usually elegantly disposed of at the end of the story. This, literary scholars have stressed, ensured that literature maintained the status quo and prohibited interracial "happy endings." Yet the endings of these stories were equally tragic for the white characters, whose lives often dissolved into jealousy, dissolution, or marital discord. Indeed, the moral of many stories appeared to be that white women could not give their husbands the kind of love their quadroon mistresses provided. Just as many fair, frail white women were described as foils to dark, voluptuous quadroon women, so their characters were also portrayed in contrast. Of all the literature surveyed in this project, not a single author granted a white, female character the ardent, selfless love every quadroon character exhibited. Instead, their love was sometimes

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[35] Ingraham, *The Quadroon,* 120; Trowbridge, *Neighbor Jackwood,* 242, 406.
[36] Child, "The Quadroons," 70; "Brown, *Clotel,* 108. "Single fetter" also from Ibid., 108.

described as childlike and innocent. More often, however, they were harshly dismissed as being incapable of warm affection, marrying instead for selfish, ambitious reasons, demanding but not returning passionate devotion, and often descending into frigidity and jealousy.

In Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans,* the brave, manly British solider Duncan plucks up the courage to ask Colonel Munro for the hand of his daughter. Munroe, rather pleased, immediately assumes that Duncan is referring to Cora, but Duncan stutters "I—I—I was not conscious of having mentioned her name." Completely nonplussed, Munroe asks who Duncan is therefore referring to, apparently never dreaming the man could desire his younger daughter. When Duncan admits that he has fallen deeply in love with Alice, Munroe reacts with total astonishment.[37]

It is clear that Cooper intends the reader to share Colonel Munroe's bewilderment. Cora is so consistently portrayed as the superior daughter in looks and temperament that Duncan's preference for Alice seems downright odd. To be sure, Alice is quite lovely in her own, fair, angelic way, but she is so weak and juvenile that she borders on the insipid. Throughout the book, as the two women are pursued and then captured by Indians, Cora exhibits a courageous spirit that deeply moves the reader. Twice, she throws herself before the mercy of the Indian chiefs who hold her party hostage and begs them to save her sister, bravely insisting that they "pour out all [their] malice" on her and "satisfy [their] revenge with a single victim." Alice, on the other hand, is constantly fainting. Whenever a situation arises that promises to be at all exciting or frightening, Cora rises to the occasion with "dark eye kindl[ing]" and blood ready to "burst its bounds," and Alice gracefully faints away until the scene is over. Even Alice's apparent love for Duncan is infantile and fragile. The way she "cling[s] to his arm with the dependency of a child" and gazes at him "with a touching expression of innocence and dependency" is in stark contrast to Cora's exciting scenes of self-sacrifice, and the passionate love of other fictional quadroons. When Cora dies, stabbed in the heart by the evil Huron chief Magua, the Delaware Indian allies think it a terrible tragedy. Though Alice has been spared and is to marry Duncan, the Indians voice the reader's—and, likely, the author's—thoughts: "that [Cora] was of a blood purer and richer than the rest of her nation," that "she was equal to the dangers and daring of a life in the woods," and that Alice was like "flakes of snow; as pure, as white, as brilliant, and as liable to melt in the fierce heats of summer, or congeal in the front of winter." It was "evident," Cooper explains, that "they deemed her less excellent than [Cora]." Reviewers often echoed the Indian's grumblings, wondering why Cora, like Scott's Rebecca, had been discarded in favor of the much less interesting Alice and Rowena.[38]

Duncan is a relatively rare example, at least in the "tragic mulatta" literature, of a white man who falls for the white woman rather than the quadroon. In doing so, he is simply following proscribed Victorian sensibilities, which after all dictated that the epitome of female beauty was pale, frail, submissive and chaste. Yet the very fact that quadroon characters complicated these virtues, and that white male characters almost always preferred them, suggests that, in the literary world, Victorian ideals could not compete with racial fantasies. In *Adela the Octoroon*, for example, the white Celestine is described as the prototype of Victorian feminine allure: "a

[37] Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans,* 158-159.
[38] Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans,* 352, 366, 86, 300, 399. For more on reviewers' take on the book, see: Forrest Robinson, "Uncertain Borders: Race, Sex, Civilization in the *Last of the Mohicans*," *Arizona Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (spring 1991): 8; Lemire, *Miscegenation,* 50; For an example of such a review, see: "Review of *The Last of the Mohicans,* by James Fenimore Cooper," *United States Literary Gazette,* May 1826, 87—94.

very lovable little creature" who "by her quiet looks, bright eyes, simple answers, and more than all, by her sad, tearful demeanor, . . . was calculated to entrap the hearts of young men." Unsurprisingly, the author and reader are not at all "entrapped" by Celestine, who is relegated to a minor role as the plot—and the white hero himself—instead follow the much more vivacious, sensuous quadroon character, Adela.[39]

Sometimes, it appears that authors simply did not know what to do with their white female characters, who seem to have been straightjacketed by Victorian expectations of proper feminine behavior. Alice in *The Last of the Mohicans* can only faint dead away at exciting moments, while the quadroon Cora fights for everyone's lives. When left widowed on her wedding day, white Louise Arnoult in *The Bravo's Daughter* becomes sickly with grief and slowly wastes away, while the quadroon Filippa cross-dresses and murders three men to save her beloved master's life. In an interesting twist on the traditional "tragic mulatta" ending, Ada in *Owned and Disowned* commits suicide while her quadroon sister Julia makes a happy, successful marriage with her white lover. Ada, it appears, is simply *too* pure and spiritual for the world: she is kept at the threshold of puberty, "no years [able to] change [her] from child to woman," a woman like a "flower "or a "cloud-tint" who appeared to exist "only to gratify our taste and love for the beautiful and pure."[40] Indeed, while the magnificent Julia falls deeply in love with the equally enamored white hero, Mr. Defoe, Ada remarks on her incapacity for such passions. "There's something so horrid in the idea of loving men," she complains to her sister,

> I don't see how girls that have any kind of respect for themselves can do it. I am sure I never could. They're all such rude, ungraceful savages. When I fall in love, it'll be with a woman—there! There's something kind and tender and gentle about you. I wish I were a man, so that you could love me more than a sister.[41]

It is certainly tempting to read into the homosexual implications within that quote, but it is perhaps more likely that the author simply intended to present Ada's incapacity to respond to male sexuality. After all, female love was thought to be entirely spiritual, "the language of," as Farnham wrote, "the beaming, tender eye, the innocent, clinging lips, the clasped hands, and the deep, tremulous tones" rather than sensual urges.[42] In Ada's mind, then, a woman's love for her would be solely spiritual and romantic, divorced from any "savage" sensuality. If the plots of various "tragic mulatta" stories like Denslow's were to be exaggerated and believed, quadroons were therefore the only women who desired and were able to sustain male love and sexuality.

Interestingly, Ada dies just when she begins to feel the stirrings of love for a man. Like most sensationalist novels, *Owned and Disowned* has a painfully convoluted plot. Julia is pursued by two brothers, one a gentleman who truly loves her and one a pirate who seeks to make her his "fancy" slave. In attempting to kidnap Julia, the pirate accidentally takes Ada instead, managing to hide his true identity and seduce her. Julia escapes to a convent and is eventually rescued from a slave auction by her lover, but Ada discovers her pirate's schemes and commits suicide. What is most notable throughout the tale is the fact that both brothers are desperately pursuing the quadroon, Julia. The gentleman, Defoe, is uninterested in Ada and his

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[39] Hosmer, *Adela the Octoroon,* 220.
[40] Denslow, *Owned and Disowned,* 43.
[41] Ibid., 45.
[42] Farnham, *Woman and Her Era,* 2: 89-90.

pirate brother only seduces her on a whim. The novel therefore seems to suggest that white femininity can neither compete with quadroon enticements nor cope with masculine sexuality.

Ada, Alice, and Louise Arnault are examples of one extreme of the literary spectrum of white womanhood. All three essentially remain children, too frail and innocent for the world's harsh blows. They embody the attributes of the Victorian "cult of true womanhood," but in doing so they remain stilted, insipid, unexciting characters rather unsuited to the sensationalist plots of their stories. No matter: authors who used this kind of boring, limited white female prototype could simply infuse their quadroon characters with all the exciting qualities many actual men—rather than the cultural status quo—desired in a woman. The excuse of a racial stain left by a few drops of black blood broke down the barriers that kept white female characters imprisoned in a literary "cult of true womanhood."

On the opposite end of the literary spectrum from Victorian angels like Ada, Alice, and Louise were white female characters portrayed as perversions of ideal womanhood. Rather than fainting, wasting away, or dying, these characters were intended to be the "tragic mulattas'" nemeses, battling jealously against them and their white, male lovers. Often, these characters were specifically presented as negative stereotypes of the "southern belle." Of course, one major reason for depicting the "belle" as pathetic or despicable was abolitionist design. This is why the "belle" character appeared increasingly often in works published in the 1850s and 60s, when the regional controversy reached its climax. Northern authors intended to show the degrading effects of slavery on white as well as black people, suggesting that the institution stripped southern women of the "cult of true womanhood" and made them lazy, selfish tyrants.[43] Nonetheless, their juxtaposition with the invariably wonderful, admirable quadroon characters painted a rather dismal picture of white womanhood in general. Ironically, in some stories the "southern belle" characters were *northern* women who ventured southwards to secure vast plantations and wealthy husbands. For this reason, the negative stereotype cannot be dismissed as a problem solely with southern women.

Northern women, too, suffered from certain, negative stereotypes—usually of the cold, puritanical variety. In Stoddard's *Two Men,* which takes place in New England, the main, white character Parke falls in love with the quadroon Charlotte instead of his foster sister, Philippa. Though the latter has loved him for years, her emotions are strangely frigid: one character declares that "nobody seems to attract her; she is the most impassive creature I ever knew, and the coolest." The author herself describes her as "pitiless, . . . hard and bright as a diamond, cold as a glacier, ignorant, obstinate, insensible." *Neighbor Jackwood,* which is centered around a New England town that unwittingly harbors the fugitive quadroon slave Charlotte, is somewhat more generous about its New England women. Nonetheless, they, too, emerge as sexually inferior to the quadroon, ranging from the jolly, but rather rough, peasant-like Mrs. Jackwood to the young Bertha, who secretly loves the white hero, Hector, but is ignored in favor of Charlotte. Hector himself dismisses all the northern white girls in his town by complaining to Charlotte that "some of them are pretty and intelligent," but they are too obsessed with their social reputations.

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[43] Kathryn Lee Seidel writes that "the belle's personality traits and the plot or life story an author invents are roughly reflective of the author's attitude toward the South itself," since "the southern belle is the symbol of the South itself." Kathryn Lee Seidel, *The Southern Belle in the American Novel* (Gainesville: University of South Florida Press, 1985), xiii, xiv. See also Harriet Beecher Stowe, *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (London: Sampson Low, Son & Co., 1853), 64.

"The worst of all is," he continues, "they have been taught by their wise mothers to subordinate all their motives and aspirations to a low matrimonial ambition."[44]

This, indeed, was one of the major flaws authors of "tragic mulatta" literature gave their white female characters, especially the "southern belles:" they viewed marriage solely as a way to entrap and enslave their lovers, or to social climb. While quadroon characters, who could not aspire to legitimate marriage, never sought to bind their men with commitments, "southern belle" characters were simultaneously demanding and miserly. In *My Southern Friends,* for example, Mr. Preston takes a new, northern wife upon the death of his first spouse. Described by another character as a "cold, selfish, sordid woman" who was "all intellect and no heart," the second Mrs. Preston is blamed for marrying only to "win a plantation and a rich planter." Once installed as mistress, she spends all her time buying herself luxuries and attending social functions, ruining her husband's credit and nearly bankrupting him. Besides savagely beating her slaves, the new Mrs. Preston appears incapable of motherly love: when her stepson disobeys her in one scene, she screams at him and smacks him in the face. A similarly cruel, ambitious, and extravagant white wife appears in *Maum Guinea's Plantation Children.* Recalling the day her master and lover brought his new wife home, the quadroon Maum Guinea declares that "De minit I looked at her I knowed she was a cold-hearted, selfish kind of a woman who'd married Massa Dudley 'cause he was rich and good family." The marriage turns out to be an unhappy one, as Mrs. Dudley proves infertile and prefers dressing up and going to parties to running a household, caring for her husband, or being bothered by children. Mr. Dudley, in his turn, lavishes even more attention on his and Maum Guinea's child, Julie. Mrs. Dudley's loveless, fruitless marriage is contrasted with the quadroon's totally selfless love for the father of her child: "I loved him too well," Maum Guinea recalls, "I'd a laid down my life for him, any day, dough he cared no more for me dan if I was cattle."[45]

The most detailed description of a "southern belle" appears in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* in which the author attempts to explain the reasons for the character's flaws and her failed marriage. Marie, the petulant, complaining, hypochondriac wife of the white male protagonist, Augustine, used to be "the belle of the season." Yet her whole life has been spent on a pedestal, waited on by slaves, caressed and adored by doting parents, and never required to perform any labor besides attending balls and basking in admiration. After marrying her, Augustine discovers that such a lady inevitably proves "quite a hard mistress in domestic life"—or, more bluntly, completely incapable. Whether because she has been so spoiled, or because she is inherently unloving, Stowe explains that "Marie never had possessed much capability of affection, or much sensibility, and the little that she had, had been merged into a most intense and unconscious selfishness; . . . [She was] a woman with no heart." Although totally lacking in empathy, Marie requires total devotion and adoration from her husband, since, Stowe explains, "there is not on earth a more merciless exactor of love from others than a thoroughly selfish woman." When Augustine's attraction to her inevitably begins to fade, "he found his sultana no way ready to resign her slave; there were abundance of tears, poutings, and small tempests, there were discontents, pinings, and upbraidings."[46] While a concubine like Brown's Clotel, for example, offered unconditional love without desiring to hold her lover "by a single fetter," white wives like Marie required total commitment while returning no emotion.

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[44] Stoddard, *Two Men,* 228, 271; Trowbridge, *Neighbor Jackwood,* 122.
[45] Kirke, *My Southern Friends,* 160, 195, 198; Victor, *Maum Guinea's Plantation Children,* 151.
[46] Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* 171—173.

Furthermore, like many other white wives in "tragic mulatta" literature, Marie is not only a completely incapable household mistress, she is also a failed mother. Many white wives in other stories, like Mrs. Preston and Mrs. Dudley, are infertile; others, like Marie, are simply neglectful. After birthing Eva, Marie becomes a "yellow, faded, sickly woman," incapable of producing other children and so ignorant of her own child that she fails to notice Eva's consumption. When she does notice her daughter, it is usually only to spurn her embraces and dismiss her as a "peculiar child."[47] Such an attitude contrasts sharply with that of Stowe's quadroon character Eliza, who is willing to sacrifice her own life for her son. One of the most popular and re-printed illustrations from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* depicted the famous scene of Eliza leaping across the Ohio River's ice floes with her child in her arms, desperately trying to escape the slave-catchers (see Figure 0.1). Stowe's scene was not original: when authors of "tragic mulatta" literature chose to give their quadroons children, they invariably presented the mothers as heroic and selfless, willing to brave great danger or even sacrifice themselves for their children's safety.[48]

The Victorian "cult of true womanhood" did not require a woman to be sexual, though the ideal woman was, above all, a mother. The "southern belle" character's cold sexuality therefore did not exclude her from the ideal, but her total lack of affection for either husband, children, or slaves, as well as her domestic inabilities, failed to make her, in Stowe's words, "a whole woman." For example, the narrator in *Cousin Franck's* household, who pens her entire novel in the form of letters to a northern friend, writes that Franck's daughter Rosalie "is a belle, selfish in the groundwork of her nature." At one point, arguing with her mother about spending her time in other ways besides obsessively studying her looks, Rosalie cries "*Useful?* Oh Mama, don't mention it, please. I abhor the word—so vulgar and utilitarian . . . degraded." Yet while white wives were most often depicted as lounging on divans, attending parties, and complaining about their servants, quadroon characters were always emphasized as impeccable mistresses of their own, small households. The domestic scenes of "tragic mulatta" stories mirrored the reality depicted in slave narratives and travelogues: the quadroon resided in a "Little House"—a small cottage purchased by her white lover—while he lived with his white family in the "Big House." In fiction, at least, all the "Little Houses" were impeccably clean and festooned with gorgeous flowers, hinting at the lush, fruitful beauty of their occupants.[49]

Most damningly, however, "southern belle" characters were portrayed as cruel as well as selfish, lazy, and cold, and sometimes took a perverted pleasure in harming their slaves. In Langdon's *Ida May*, the magnificent southern belle Mabel is a completely heartless character. When finding out that her father obeyed her wishes by forbidding his favorite slave to marry the woman he loved, her "blue eye was calm and cold, and those beautiful lips wore a smile of exultation." When that same slave kills himself rather than suffer the indignity of a whipping for having attempted escape with his forbidden wife and child, she thinks it "a downright shame."

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[47] Ibid., 173, 191.

[48] For examples of quadroons who sacrifice themselves for their children, see: Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*; E.D.E.N Southworth [Emma Dorothy Eliza Nevitte Southworth], *Retribution: A Tale of Passion* (1840; repr., Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson, 1856); "Pocahontas" [Mrs Emily Clemens Pearson], *Cousin Franck's Household, or, Scenes in the Old Dominion* (Boston: Upham, Ford, and Olmstead, 1853); Lydia Maria Child, *The Quadroons*; Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; William Wells Brown, *Clotel*; Mrs Metta V Victor, *Maum Guinea*; Edmund Kirke, *My Southern Friends*.

[49] "Whole woman," see Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* 172; Pearson, *Cousin Franck's Household,* 33, 100; For a classic description of the flower-festooned cottage, see Brown, *Clotel*, 79.

This sentiment, however, is not due to the tragic nature of his death, but to the fact that he had been commissioned to build their summer home. "It is so inconvenient to lose him," she sighs, and Walter, the white hero whose infatuation with her quickly fades as he falls in love with the far more worthy quadroon, Ida, angrily exclaims that Mabel is "empty-hearted as a soap-bubble." The evil second wife in *My Southern Friends,* Mrs. Preston, wears a similar "expression of triumphant malignity" when she tells the quadroon Selma that she is to be sold. Having found out that Selma, whom her husband had welcomed into his white family, was in fact his daughter by his quadroon slave Phyllis, she had her "whipped till her flesh was cut into shreds, and she fainted from loss of blood," and then left her in an old cabin to die. Horribly jealous of the sweet, beautiful Selma, Mrs. Preston gives "the naturally high-spirited and sensitive girl the most menial employments," and beats her with fifty lashes when she does not work quickly enough.[50]

Such plots contradicted many southern racial stereotypes. Rather than presenting quadroons as "Jezebels" coming between healthy white marriages, authors often chose to present white women as the evil, jealous barriers to true, interracial love. In most "tragic mulatta" literature, a white wife who found out about her husband's quadroon mistresses either tortured her by chopping off her hair, beating her, and working her to the bone, or sold her and her children. The "tragic" aspect of the literature, then, could not be interpreted as a result of interracial relations: instead, it rested at the core of white marriage. "Tragic mulatta" plots therefore seem to have suggested that, had the white male characters simply substituted quadroon concubinage for white marriage, their unions would have been happier, more loving, and more fertile, and their homes the true, Victorian ideal of a "domestic haven." Of course, the moral of many of these stories was that slavery itself, not white women, was the cause of the tragedies. Yet almost every plot also contained the suggestion that slavery was simply the impediment that kept some white men away from true, legitimate, socially-accepted interracial marriages. Of course, slavery perfectly suited men who desired only the satiation of their lusts, but the "tragic mulatta" literature also suggested that certain quadroons were worthy of far more, and would have been loved and revered as much as white wives had the "peculiar institution" not doomed them to degradation. Without slavery, many plots seemed to suggest, white men who truly fell in love with non-white women would be free to openly pursue and legally marry them, unfettered by the need to marry white women for ambitious or social reasons.

"Alas! This horrid gulph—this social abyss that yawns between us. Well! It cannot separate souls. Our love shall bridge it—Ha!"[51]

The Threat

At its center, "tragic mulatta" literature posed a threat to white womanhood. The danger was suggested by descriptions of quadroons as superior to white women in appearance, intellect and character, by plots that threw white men deeply in love with quadroons at the expense of white women, and by characters who directly addressed it. In Brown's *Clotel,* for example, the author candidly writes "Every married woman in the far South looks upon her husband as unfaithful, and regards every quadroon servant as a rival." In *Ida May,* Mrs. Bell tells her husband that he must sell Lizzy, their quadroon servant, because "she is growing so very pretty."

[50] Langdon, *Ida May,* 255, 312; Kirke, *My Southern Friends,* 253—256.
[51] Reid, *The Quadroon,* 233.

When he casually tells her that he has decided to keep her, because she has "pretty manners" and can be used "to wait on the table, or take care of the children," Mrs. Bell lashes out at him. With icy blue eyes and teeth set in "an almost fierce expression," she stares straight into his face and says "I shall do no such thing. *The girl will be too pretty.* I will have no more such scenes as I had with Ellen." Lest the nature of the previous relationship with the unknown "Ellen" escape the reader, Mrs. Bell bluntly continues "I'll have no more handsome servant girls telling me my husband thinks more of them than he does of me!"[52]

One of the most interesting scenes in any "tragic mulatta" story occurs in *Cousin Franck's Household,* when it appears that the quadroon woman Selma is literally *becoming* her white mistress—a scenario that seems to echo previously mentioned court cases like *Hartley* and *Jelineau.* The narrator writes that "Selma is now fairer even than [her mistress] Regina," and that, as a result, the sickly white woman now "feels constant disquiet in [her] presence." Regina exclaims that "Selma is my shadow! . . . she grows fairer every day. I declare, my complexion is getting bronze, it is, indeed!" She bitterly recalls that visiting friends did not even recognize her, actually addressing Selma as mistress. When a peddler who comes to the door makes the same mistake, Regina cries out "There it is again! . . . as I live, I am to be haunted with the intolerable idea. Selma is *myself.*" White men, too, appear to notice and appreciate the change. The narrator writes, in a rather spiteful way, that the man Regina desires for her daughter infuriates her by appearing to prefer Selma. "Indeed I see not how he can help it," the narrator admits, "for she is a beautiful, a superior woman. Madame Regina has observed this, and added it to her other sources of disquiet."[53] The implications of such a comparison are provocative. On the one hand, it highlights the grotesque perversions of southern domesticity: Selma is also Regina's illegitimate half-sister, due to the philandering of Regina's father. On the other hand, it suggests that Selma's many virtues make her a superior model of femininity, so that the quadroon slave woman slowly supplants her white sister as head of the household. The moral of the story therefore seems to present a kind of retribution: not only for the sins of the father, who failed in his domestic duties by committing adultery under his own roof, but also the sins of white women, whose weak, spoiled, selfish or inept natures caused a different kind of domestic failure.

In Captain Mayne Reid's *The Quadroon,* the narrator himself is astonished at the fact that he cannot return a beautiful white woman's love because he is so enamored of her quadroon slave, Aurore. "Why did I not love her, young, rich, and beautiful?" he asks of the white woman. After all, he had saved her life when the steamboat upon which they were both traveling exploded, and, during his recovery, she had been his gracious host and devoted nurse at her magnificent plantation home. "Why? Because I loved another—*I loved Aurore.*" Even he cannot deny his "perplexity" that, every time he spoke with the white woman, "my thoughts dwelt upon the *Quadroon.*" Reid's book is interesting not only because the author is the first person narrator, directly relaying his interracial desires to the reader, but also because it ends happily. Aurore is freed (in the nick of time, of course, just as she is about to be bought by the classic, lusty white villain) and returned to the arms of her lover, the narrator. Yet the author remains intriguingly ambiguous about their "happy ending," saying to the reader that "the after-scenes of perfect bliss" must "be left to your fancy, if your fancy deign to act." All he allows himself to admit is that "a 'lover's adventures' usually en[d] with the consummation of his hopes—not even always

[52] Brown, *Clotel,* 144; Langdon, *Ida May,* 91.
[53] Pearson, *Cousin Franck's Household,* 230-232.

extending to the altar."[54] Such an ending suggests that the narrator never actually married Aurore. After all, he would not have to, since a quadroon was expected to allow the "consummation of his hopes" without the trouble of a legitimate union that was, in any case, illegal. More importantly, however, it leaves the nature of the happy ending—concubinage, marriage, consummation, or anything else—up to the reader, suggesting that it is the audience's desire that shapes the plot's direction.

Of course, the narrator of *The Quadroon* was well aware that the majority of his readers did indeed hope for a happy "consummation of his hopes;" that was, in fact, the moral of almost every "tragic mulatta" story, even those that ended in grief. Brown's *Clotel,* for example, ends with a remonstrance aimed at the reader. "Thus died Clotel, the daughter of Thomas Jefferson," the author announces after Clotel leaps off a bridge to escape the slave-catchers. "Such was the life and such the death of a woman whose virtues and goodness of heart would have done honour to one in a higher station of life, and who, if she had been born in any other land but that of slavery, would have been honoured and loved."[55] Such an ending suggests to the reader that the only obstacle in the way of the "consummation" of hopes—those of Clotel's lover, the author himself, and the reader—was slavery. Indeed, almost all "tragic mulatta" stories moralized about the need to ignore race for the sake of love. Such a message was certainly radical for a society that was so adamantly against miscegenation, yet even authors who were not abolitionists expounded it. Some chose to voice the injustice of prejudice through their characters. In *Adela the Octoroon,* for example, the quadroon slave Eunice complains "Why should the slight shade between my complexion, and that of the imperious woman whom I now hear scolding her slave in the cabin, make the wide difference between us?" Mentioning all the traits that "tragic mulatta" authors emphasized, she declares that "My features are more regular, my eyes more sparkling, my expression more amiable, my form more symmetrical, and my manners more refined." White male characters often struggled with similar internal dialogues, finding their love beset by their social conditioning. In Ingraham's *The Quadroon,* the Spanish cavalier who has fallen in love with the quadroon Azelie moans "Can such a one be loved by thee? No, not if she were guilty of . . . [a] slavish descent." Then he suddenly cries out "But is she guilty of these? Is she not as fair and glorious in virgin beauty . . . ? Do I love her, then, or hate her for the acts of the generation before her, or for the blood of her ancestors?" Concluding that no such stain is evident, for she "appears a creation of all beauty, grace, and pity," he triumphantly asserts "I love her for *herself!*" Interestingly, this apparently radical view was not espoused by an abolitionist; Ingraham was a Southerner living in Mississippi, who even published a series of letters for the Philadelphia *Saturday Courier* that defended the South from abolitionists' extreme charges and provided a scathing retort to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.[56]

Lest readers suppose that white male characters may only have fallen in love with quadroons because the former were Northerners, abolitionists, or otherwise free from racism, many authors made their characters admit the opposite. "I'm a New-Englander, and I've my prejudices against black blood," the white man who falls in love with Maum Guinea's quadroon daughter Julie admits in *Maum Guinea's Plantation Children.* "I don't think it's right to mix it

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[54] Reid, *The Quadroon,* 179, 181, 379.
[55] Brown, *Clotel,* 218.
[56] Hosmer, *Adela the Octoroon,* 111; Ingraham, *The Quadroon,* 35; For information on Ingraham, see: Edwin Anderson Alderman, Joel Chandler Harris, eds, *Library of Southern Literature* (Atlanta: The Martin & Hoyt Company), 6: 2592

wid w'ite. But I'm so infatuated wid dat angel, I forget everything only dat I love her." Hector in *Neighbor Jackwood* admits the same, saying that the moment he abandoned Charlotte (having just discovered her quadroon blood), he "saw the stupendous folly, the guilt. I had given love, the life of my life, to fatten an unworthy pride." He explains that he returned to prove he "had the courage to set [his] heel upon prejudice and conventionality, and stand by [her] side, in the face of the world." The narrator in *The Quadroon* makes the same defiant declaration, crying out "Alas! This horrid gulph—this social abyss that yawns between us. Well! It cannot separate souls. Our love shall bridge it—Ha!" After all, he tells the reader, with "the world's obloquy in one scale, my love for Aurore in the other—the former weighed but a feather."[57]

All of these—Hosmer's *Adela,* Ingraham's *The Quadroon,* Victor's *Maum Guinea's Plantation Children,* Trowbridge's *Neighbor Jackwood* and Reid's *The Quadroon*—end happily. Furthermore, many were extremely popular in their time. *Maum Guinea,* for example, was one of the most popular books of its day, and was reportedly carried around by Union soldiers during the Civil War.[58] The moral of this "tragic mulatta" literature, then, cannot really be seen to be a warning *against* the tragic consequences of miscegenation. If that were so, the pathetic endings of doomed interracial love would not be "tragic" at all—indeed, the only "tragic" endings would, ironically, be those of joyful interracial consummation. It is possible, then, that the more revolutionary moral behind this kind of literature—perhaps so radical that it was not fully realized by either author or reader, but rather subconsciously fantasized—was not only that interracial love *could* and *did* often happen, but also that it *should.* It was a moral, furthermore, that extended beyond "tragic mulatta" fiction and beyond black and white plots. As successive chapters will show, female "color" of any kind held a public taboo and a private lure.

[57] Victor, *Maum Guinea,* 176; Trowbridge, *Neighbor Jackwood,* 235; Reid, *The Quadroon,* 222, 233.
[58] Kinney, *Amalgamation!* 79.

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"Why Are Your People So Fond of Our Women?"[1]
"Noble Savages," "Dirty Squaws," and Western Wanderings

In 1610 William Strachey, the Secretary of Virginia, arrived at the struggling fort of Jamestown with curiosity and trepidation about relations with the local Indians. While certainly aware of portrayals of natives as savage, promiscuous, and unpredictable, nothing could have prepared him for a sight so shocking that he recorded it in his 1612 memoir, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania.*

A young Indian girl of the Powhatan Confederacy often came to the Fort and merrily called all the young men to the central marketplace. There, bald as an egg and naked as her name day, she would rally them all to join her in turning cartwheels. This "well-featured but wanton young girl" would, "falling on [her] hands turning [her] heeles upwards," then "wheele so her self naked . . . all the Fort over," the men either following her or watching in great glee.[2]

The description of this little girl, bald and naked because her tribe treated clothing and hair as markers of puberty, is one of the first mentions of the famous Pocahontas. It is, needless to say, drastically opposite to the woman envisaged by poets, authors, playwrights and Disney animators from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. When in 1858 the famous author John Esten Cooke introduced Pocahontas as a gorgeous young woman "with long raven hair, falling in profuse masses around delicate golden cheeks," only "*semi*-nude, but chaste as a statue of modesty" and so "slight, slender, [and] graceful" that her "every movement [was] as supple and undulating as a young willow swaying to and fro," he was clearly unaware of the bald, naked, mischievous and "wanton" little girl whose cartwheels provided Jamestown's prime entertainment.[3] Such a vast distance between reality and memory—or, perhaps more aptly, legend masquerading as memory—exemplifies the contradictions inherent in portrayals of Indian women throughout American history. Historians like Rayna Greene have posited that, particularly as the ideology of the "noble savage" became increasingly popular in the nineteenth century, Indian women were portrayed either as promiscuous, savage "squaw-types," or beautiful, virtuous "Pocahontas-types."[4] That Pocahontas herself seems to have fallen into both categories depending on the timing of her portrayal evidences the ambiguity at the heart of white men's perceptions of Indian women's sexuality.

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[1] The title of this chapter is derived from a quote by an Arikara chief to Henry Marie Brackenridge. "I was wondering," he mused, "whether you white people have any women amongst you . . . . Why is it that your people are so fond of our women? One might suppose they had never seen any before." Henry Marie Brackenridge, *Journal of a Voyage up the River Missouri; Performed in Eighteen Hundred and Eleven,* vol. 6 of *Early Western Travels,* ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland: Arthur H Clark Co., 1904), 130.

[2] William Strachey, *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania,* eds Louis B Wright and Virginia Freund (1612; reprint, Cambridge: the Hakluyt Society, 1953), 113.

[3] John Esten Cooke, "Wandering on the Banks of the York." *Southern Literary Messenger*, June 1858, 457-65.

[4] This contradiction was previously discussed in Chapter One. See Green, "The Pocahontas Perplex," 698-714.

The real story of Pocahontas also demonstrated other time-honored traditions in North American Indian relations that have eluded historical memory. While the doomed love story between Pocahontas and John Smith is a total fabrication, her real romance with John Rolfe has been de-emphasized—perhaps because it ended in interracial marriage and a mixed-blood child. While the historical record is spotty and dismally unromantic, it appears that John Rolfe, who had tragically lost his own wife and family on his Atlantic journey, fell in love with Pocahontas during her Jamestown captivity. She, by then a teenager, was kept as a hostage while relations with the Powhatan Confederacy deteriorated, and John Rolfe took it upon himself to "civilize" her. He taught her European languages, customs, and history, explained table manners and dress codes, and attempted to convert her to Christianity. When he and Pocahontas bravely sought out her father to obtain his permission for their marriage, they initiated a "golden age" of peace between the two peoples. Rolfe's instructions and Pocahontas's almost miraculous adaptability, moreover, prepared her to be the dinner guest of British royalty when she journeyed to London.[5]

Indeed, Rolfe's civilizational instruction seems to have been so successful at turning a "wanton" little cart-wheeler into a poised Indian ambassador that in 1614 Governor Thomas Dale attempted to arrange a second marriage between himself and Pocahontas's sister, even though he had a white wife in England. While Powhatan refused, Rolfe and Pocahontas's union was nonetheless sanctified by the birth of their son, Thomas Rolfe, who went on to found one of the most distinguished dynasties in Southern history.[6] Decades later, Jamestown settlers like the historian Robert V. Beverly were still expounding on the virtues of the lovely Indian maidens, describing them as "generally beautiful, possessing an uncommon delicacy of shape and features." John Lawson, the author of *The History of North Carolina,* agreed in 1714 that the Indian girls in those parts were "as fine-shaped Creatures . . . as any in the Universe," having eyes that were "very brisk and amorous" and alluring "Bodies of a smooth Nature."[7]

Such tastes cannot solely be attributed to single young men of the Virginia colony who panted for female companionship of any kind. Even the Puritans had relations with Indian women, often fretfully mentioning them in court records when the women ran from unhappy Indian marriages into the arms of New England men.[8] In a tradition that foreshadowed the keeping of "fancy girls," several New England settlers captured young Indian girls as domestic servants. Captain Israel Stoughton, the leader of the Massachusetts Bay Colony force in the Pequot War, wrote to the governor that among the captives he had collected, "there is one I formerly mentioned that is the fairest and largest that I saw among them, to whom I have given a cloak to clothe her." He asserted his "desire" that she be put aside as his "servant," and went on to state that "there is a little squaw that Stewart Calient desireth, to whom he hath given a coat," and that "Lieutenant Davenport also desireth one, to wit a small one that hath three strokes upon the stomach."[9] The use of the word "desire," the mention of physical beauty, and the providing of certain marks of ownership like cloaks and coats suggests that these "servants" had similar roles to the future "fancies."

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[5] Theda Perdue, e., *Sifters: Native American Women's Lives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 23—25.
[6] Ibid., 24-25.
[7] Beverly and Lawson quoted in Walter O'Meara, *Daughters of the Country: The Women of the Fur Traders and Mountain Men* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc, 1968), 15, 16.
[8] One description of this occurrence stated that "these women often resort to the English houses, where ex pares cum paribus congregate, in sex, I mean they do somewhat ease their misery by complaining, and seldom depart without relief." O'Meara, *Daughters of the Country*, 16.
[9] Ibid., 114.

John Rolfe, Robert Beverly, John Lawson, Captain Stoughton, Stewart Calient and Lieutenant Davenport are therefore examples of men who complicate the historical memory of British imperialism in North America. While many men did refuse to mix with Indian women because they considered them savages and pagans, others in British colonial society maintained a variety of surprisingly open relations with Indian women. At the same time that many Jamestown men were refusing to marry Indian women because of their paganism, John Rolfe was successfully managing to "civilize" his Indian wife for the European court, and the Governor was attempting to arrange for himself a polygamous marriage. At the same time that eighteenth-century historians were chronicling the bloody conflicts erupting between the "savages" and the settlers, they were also commenting on the sexual attractiveness of Indian women. And at the same time that Puritan captains like Stoughton were wiping out entire tribes like the Pequots, they also seem to have been saving the female captives as personal concubines. Just as with their relations with black women, white American men's private treatment of Indian women often contradicted their public avowals.

In the nineteenth century, these ambiguities and contradictions became even more marked, especially because they became increasingly apparent in an ever-growing body of published literature. On the one hand, regions on the East Coast, and especially the North, considered "their" Indians to have virtually disappeared. This physical distance, as well as the luxury of decades of reflection on the "Indian problem," allowed for the rise of the romantic ideal of the "noble savage." For many nineteenth-century Americans, daily contact with Indians consisted of a glimpse of a cigar-store statue or an imaginative foray into a frontier story or captivity narrative. On the other hand, the nineteenth century witnessed the opening of vast territories in the West and the incorporation of new frontier states. For settlers in these regions, "wild" Indians were a very real, sometimes threatening presence, one they increasingly pressured the government and military to eradicate. Trappers, traders, settlers, soldiers and gold rushers, moreover, provided more published portrayals of Indian women to the increasingly literate American public than had ever before been available. Depending on the region and time period as well as the background and intentions of the author, these proliferating nineteenth-century portrayals of Indians ran the gamut from "noble" to "bloodthirsty" savages. Descriptions of Indian women's appearance, sexuality, work, domestic instincts and interactions with both Indian and white men fed the American public's imagination, exacerbating rather than resolving the Pocahontas/squaw ambiguity and prompting the proliferation of both types in American literature.

This chapter will concentrate primarily on these white, nineteenth-century portrayals of Indians, analyzing the way their stereotypes informed their cultural interpretations. Acknowledging the racism, ignorance, and misunderstanding that informed these perceptions, I also analyze the reality that informed the cultural confusion. Nonetheless, this chapter will emphasize white perception over Indian reality in order to highlight the myths that became so powerful and prevalent in the American mindset.

"Some writers, . . . have written down the character of the North American Indian, as dark, relentless, cruel and murderous . . . —whilst others have given them a high rank, . . . as honourable and highly intellectual beings."[10]

[10] George Catlin, *Illustrations of the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians with Letters and Notes* (London: Henry Bohn, 1850), 1: 8.

The "Noble Savage" and the Bloodthirsty Indian

The history of interracial relations in the British colonies differs starkly with that of the Spanish colonies because it was, from the beginning, remarkably exclusionary—despite the aforementioned instances of racial mixing. While the predominantly male population of Spanish settlers was initially encouraged to intermarry with the native population, thus amassing power, wealth, and status, British settlers were specifically warned against the dangers of such interactions. While many men nonetheless pursued their own desires, most ministers and magistrates attempted to cement cultural, social, and legal barriers against interracial relations. The dawn of the American republic, however, brought the possibility of change spearheaded by federal policy.

Thomas Jefferson believed that Indians were fully capable of reaching the heights of civilization heretofore only achieved by whites. Certain environmental and historical factors had kept them in an "uncultivated state," he wrote, but whites could nonetheless teach them to become equals. Besides advocating a civilization program in which Indians would be educated in the English language, western customs, farming techniques, and other supposed trappings of civilization, Jefferson believed that miscegenation would speed the integration of two noble races. In 1808, he informed a delegation of Delawares that by "mix[ing] with us in marriage . . . . You will unite yourselves with us, and we shall all be Americans."[11] At the turn of the century, then, officially sanctioned marriage between whites and Indians in the newly formed states seemed a significant possibility.[12]

These ideas were not entirely sudden or out of place: they reflected Enlightenment beliefs about the inherent equality of all members of the human race.[13] However, the fact that these ideas inspired certain political leaders did not mean that they translated into actions among the general American populace. Jefferson's dreamy descriptions of the Indians as a noble race who "breath[ed] an ardent love of liberty and independence" did not sit well with frontiersmen whose relentless push West frequently brought them into conflict with Indians. Between 1815 and 1829, especially, the earlier hope of men like Jefferson that the "Indian problem" could be resolved by peaceful domestication and assimilation was openly challenged by Americans (most of whom hailed from western states) who claimed that the civilization program was an abysmal failure. The fact that many Indians resented the attempts to strip them of their lands and cultural traditions increasingly came to be seen by whites as incontrovertible proof that they were forever paralyzed in an inferior, savage state. In 1825, Henry Clay of Kentucky could thus openly state in a cabinet meeting that "it was impossible to civilize Indians" because "it was not in their

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[11] Reginald Horsman "The Indian Policy of an 'Empire of Liberty,'" in *Native Americans and the Early Republic*, eds Frederick Hoxie, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 46—50.

[12] This is not to suggest that official policies in the colonial period had never considered intermarriage between whites and Indians. The leaders of Roanoke and Jamestown, for example, initially considered the possibility, as evidenced by Governor Dale's attempt to marry Pocahontas's sister. In the French colonies that later became American states, moreover, marriage between Indian women and white men was often actively encouraged by local officials. See: Jennifer Spear, *Race, Sex, and Social Order in Early New Orleans* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 2009). Nonetheless, official policy in the British colonies swiftly became racially exclusive.

[13] Horsman "The Indian Policy," 58. Of course, American political leaders like Jefferson did not apply these beliefs to the entirety of the human race: blacks, for example, were still considered by many Enlightenment thinkers to be immutably inferior.

nature." As a "breed" that was "essentially inferior to the Anglo Saxon race," they were not "improvable" and were therefore "destined to extinction." Such thoughts reflect a growing belief in scientific racism: while Indians had often previously been seen as "savages" and "pagans" capable of civilization and Christianization, many in the mid nineteenth century began to see them as inherently, immutably inferior because of their race. With the inauguration of Andrew Jackson as the first frontier president in 1830, the era of Enlightenment-inspired federal Indian policy came to an end.[14]

Of course, whether it advocated assimilation or removal, federal policy alone was not sufficient to change the perceptions of the general American populace. While Jefferson's ideas of amalgamation were generally perceived as radical by the first decades of the nineteenth century, the romantic ideal of the "noble savage" greatly wronged by whites still had resonance in many parts of the nation. After Indian removal in the South in the 1830s—not to mention many previous centuries of warfare, genocide, and plague—the entire region east of the Appalachians became almost emptied of an Indian presence. The more invisible the Indian was in white American society, the safer it was to imagine him as a tragic, virtually extinct threat. As the North embarked upon an era of rapid industrialization, trading vast American forests and open fields for houses and factory spires, the Indian came to be viewed as an organic part of a lost, nostalgic American past.[15]

Literature reveled in portrayals of the Indians as childlike in their simplicity and closeness to nature, and noble in their independence and bravery. The nineteenth century witnessed an increasing demand for a literature native to the continent, and the Indian was an exotic character who linked Americans to a unique, heroic past and set them apart from the European experience. James Fenimore Cooper's frontier stories became the American equivalent of Sir Walter Scott's *Waverly* novels.[16] The Pocahontas legend, moreover, emerged from obscurity to become one of the most well-known and exhaustively retold stories of the century, appearing in poems, short stories, novels, plays and songs. Virginians even admitted intense pride in their supposed descent from Pocahontas, finding in her a link to royal lineage. Southern writers often mentioned the prominent Randolph family of Virginia, who were "proud of the blood of Pocahontas," a "high-spirited and generous woman." Such a lineage gave Americans a sense of legitimacy, of roots in an ancient American past. Tellingly, Company E of the 4th Virginia Cavalry in the Civil War proudly displayed their claim to America's past by calling themselves the Powhatan Guard and flying a flag painted with a gorgeous, suspiciously white-skinned Pocahontas.[17]

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[14] Ibid., 58—60; Russell David Edmunds, Frederick E. Hoxie, Neal Salisbury, *The People: A History of Native America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007), 221.

[15] Elise Marienstras, "The Common Man's Indian: The Image of the Indian as a Promoter of National Identity in the Early National Era," in *Native Americans and the Early Republic,* 295—296.

[16] Hubbell, "The Smith-Pocahontas Story in Literature," 276. For more on "the tremendous vogue of the Indian in early nineteenth-century American literature," and the "prevalence of a sympathetic approach to Indian subjects" as an aspect of the formation of an American national identity, see Sherry Sullivan, "A Redder Shade of Pale: The Indianization of Heroes and Heroines in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction," *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 20, no. 1 (Spring, 1987): 57-75.

[17] Tilton, *Pocahontas,*10, 31, 54, 170. Nineteenth-century quotes about the Randolph family found in: Ebeneazer Baldwin, *Observations on the Physical, Intellectual, and Moral Qualities of Our Colored Population* (New Haven: L.H Young, 1834), 45, and Samuel Stanhope Smith, *An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species,* ed. Winthrop D. Jordan (1787; repr., Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1965), 201—202.

At the same time that the eastern seaboard states began to churn out literature that conformed to the "noble savage" ideal, a separate kind of literature was being produced in frontier territories. In the stark, harsh wilderness of the West, civilization had not sufficiently entrenched itself to produce a regional literature. What it did produce, however, which successfully fed the appetites of an intensely curious American readership, was a new brand of travel literature. Trappers and traders of the fur companies led the way, first publishing diaries and travelogues in the late eighteenth century, and soon an increasing demand for such reports encouraged nineteenth-century accounts from settlers, soldiers, tourists, guides and gold rushers. The vast majority were written by men, and no account failed to mention the Indians. Some, like the painter George Catlin, wrote their travelogues with the specific agenda of promoting the "noble savage" ideology. Catlin wrote that his intention was to "len[d] a hand to a dying nation, who have no historians or biographers of their own," in order to portray "the memory of a truly lofty and noble race."[18] Others, like Alexander Henry the Younger, appeared to find no qualities besides dishonesty, alcoholism, and violence in Indian societies. No matter what stance they took on the Indian race, no account failed to mention Indian women. Indeed, most accounts appear to have judged each tribe—or the entire race, if the author was inclined to vast generalizations—according to the appearance, duties, and characteristics of their women. Just as white women were equated with white civilization and Victorian domesticity, so Indian women were seen to be indexes to the virtues or vices of their entire people.

This chapter will primarily examine the travel literature produced in the West, while the following chapter will focus on the more simplistic, idealized "noble savage" fiction produced on the eastern seaboard and in Europe. The unadulterated "noble savage" archetype is exceptional in the western genre. Most authors saw too much of Indian violence and "vices" like alcoholism to unequivocally believe such an ideal. Nonetheless, what emerges from a broad analysis of the accounts is an astonishing lack of concordance. Almost every traveler made specific distinctions between Indian tribes that run the gamut from idealizations reflective of the "noble savage" to dismissals of barbarism. Furthermore, the travelogues contradict each other. For example, David Thompson wrote that "the curse of the Mandanes [*sic*] is an almost total want of chastity," but George Catlin found them to have an "excessive modesty of demeanor, which render[s] them exceedingly pleasing and beautiful."[19] While quadroons were almost universally admired for a relatively standard set of perceived qualities, American travel writers appear to have been unable to come to a consensus about Indian women. First of all, their skin tones, facial features, and hair textures ranged so widely that some, like the Mandans, were reported to have blond hair and light eyes, while others, like the California "Digger" Indians, were described as having "Negro" features. While there was far less emphasis on Indians than blacks to be mixed-race in order to be considered attractive, authors had conflicted feelings about the desirability of their admittedly "dusky" skin. Even more importantly, a consensus about Indian women's sexual habits was hard to reach because the sexual culture of each tribe varied along a vast spectrum. Racial perceptions of black women were relatively unaffected by perceptions of African culture by the nineteenth century, since the slave trade had ceased in 1808 and most blacks living in the United States were therefore "Americanized." Racial perceptions of Indian women, on the other hand, were

[18] Catlin, *Illustrations*, 1: 3.
[19] David Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative of his Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812* in vol. 12 of *Publications of the Champlain Society*, ed. Richard Gilchrist Glover (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1962), 234; Catlin, *Illustrations,* 1: 93.

very much informed by the unique practices of their particular tribe at a certain time. Whether these conformed to the standards of American society—or simply the author's standards—informed the portrayal of their desirability.

Nonetheless, one pattern does emerge from the travel literature written by white men. Although each author had his own idea of the qualities of the women of a particular tribe, every single one admitted to the desirability, beauty, and superior attributes of at least *one.* It appears that authors' portrayals of various Indian women of different tribes reflected the numerous, varied sexual preferences and appetites of antebellum American men. Each portrayal, then, did not simply reflect overall perceptions of the race itself, or the qualities ascribed to a dark skin color. Rather, they reflected the combination of certain perceptions ascribed to dark skin *as well as* those ascribed to particular cultural practices. Just as various characteristics based on the "whiteness" of their skin and behavior were attributed to mixed-race black women like "fancies" and quadroon mistresses, so these factors played into white men's perceptions of Indian women; they, too, were seen to occupy a liminal space in the gender spectrum. On the one hand, some evidenced enough "civilized" qualities like domesticity, submission, and loyalty to be considered suitable partners. On the other hand, the very stereotypes considered "uncivilized" and particularly attributed to darker races provided their own enticements: a more open and available sexuality, a wildness and ferocity that suited the frontier world, and a cultural predisposition toward slave-like work and slavish obedience. Before a genre of fictional literature combined all of these perceived qualities into a heroic, Pocahontas-like ideal, travel literature presented the American public with a far more realistic, yet far more confusing, array of contradictory portrayals.

An astonishing array of people kept written records of their journeys West. For one thing, the trip was a grand adventure, a kind of American odyssey that promised to promote native legends equal to those of any European explorer or crusader. Many travelers wrote their accounts with the express purpose of publishing them, knowing that Americans from the White House to the rural farmhouse were begging for descriptions of the vast, new lands. Others, like Lewis and Clark or the superintendents of various forts, wrote official reports for the government. Still others wrote personal diaries that were often later shared with family and friends. At first, most authors were trappers and traders associated with the major fur companies. Later, soldiers who were engaged in conflicts with Indians or Mexicans, as well as gold rushers and settlers, joined the ever-growing tide of migrants. This chapter will focus primarily on the early travelers, particularly the trappers and traders, as the very first chroniclers of Indian relations and the most active participants in interracial marriages. It will, moreover, primarily analyze *published* travelogues, especially those that were so popular with the reading public that they were quoted in periodicals and fiction, and re-printed in numerous editions. While it is virtually impossible to catalog *all* antebellum writings on Indian women, a focus on the most popular, published material will highlight the specific kinds of descriptions that were most prevalent, recognizable, and fascinating to the American literary public.

Fur traders were a decidedly motley crew. The majority were white Europeans or Americans, but they hailed from all social classes. Some were graduates of elite institutions like Harvard and Oxford; some were titled European nobility with vast estates who experienced an inexplicable ennui and a hankering for buffalo hunts; some were extremely wealthy merchants with considerable political power; some were criminal fugitives, social outcasts, quirky loners, poverty-stricken desperados, or, as Sir George Simpson wrote, "the very scum of the country. .

the most unruly and troublesome gang to deal with in this or perhaps any other part of the world."[20] Most of them, however, shared a brand of "aggressive masculinity" that fired their desire to eschew the trappings of civilization, brave the treacherous routes, and walk brazenly into "wild Indian" territory with oiled rifles and demands for hunting privileges. Many, furthermore, were drawn by a special desire to lay eyes on Indian women.

Historian Walter O'Meara wrote that "when a callow youth in the East decided to go West and 'see the Elephant,' he was not thinking about the natural beauties of the Rockies. More likely, he was recalling tales of amorous adventures regaled by boastful frontiersmen back from the wild, free, uninhibited Indian Country."[21] Certainly, the lure of the West lay in its degree of separation from the civilization equated with the East. Taboo interracial relations with Indian women were part and parcel of the unrestricted freedoms the so-called wilderness was imagined to offer. In a land essentially devoid of white females, where a man's business privileges rested on the good will of neighboring Indian tribes, sex and marriage with Indian women was essential. The unfailing tendency of travelogue writers to detail the various characteristics of the Indian women they encountered was therefore not only a trope to garner readers' attention; often, it was a chronicle of the qualities of a potential sexual partner. Indian men immediately noticed white men's fascination with Native women. "I was wondering," an Arikara chief mused to Henry Marie Brackenridge, "whether you white people have any women amongst you . . . . Why is it that your people are so fond of our women? One might suppose they had never seen any before."[22] To many white men, this was very close to the truth: an Indian woman was a total novelty, quite literally considered a race apart from a white woman—a fact that often made white men particularly "fond" of them.

"All that is finest in the human form. . . . No individual of the white race can compare with them"[23]

Appearance

Almost every travel account began its report of Indian women with a description of their appearances. The majority found the women in most tribes to be astonishingly attractive, commenting admiringly on their unique, intricately decorated clothing, the lovely jewels that sparkled on their dainty wrists and ankles, and their graceful forms and long, flowing hair. Even when authors differed in their opinions about Indian women's other virtues, like modesty or intelligence, most agreed that they possessed a wild, enchanting kind of allure. For this reason, Indian women were often compared to nymphs or ancient goddesses.

Very few accounts actually described Indian women as unattractive, and even those that did acknowledged that the ugly traits were specific to only a few, scattered tribes. Almost every account that reported disgust with Indian women specified that it was only the tribes of the

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[20] O'Meara, *Daughters of the Country*, 4. Some examples that O'Meara provides of the types of men listed in this paragraph are the noblemen David Douglas and Sir Alexander Mackenzie, the merchants William McGillivray and Ramsay Crooks, and the "great" men Dr. John McLoughlin, the "Father of Oregon," and David Thompson.
[21] Ibid., *Daughters of the Country*, 17.
[22] Brackenridge, *Journal of a Voyage*, 130.
[23] Rudolph Friedrich Kurz, "Journal of Rudolf Friedrich Kurz," trans. Myrtis Jarrell, ed. J.N.B. Hewitt, in *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 115*, Smithsonian Institution (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1937), 38.

Pacific Northwest—those farthest removed from white contact—that were so unsightly. Most tellingly, these remote tribes practiced cultural disfigurement like tattooing, piercing, and head-binding that appalled and confused their white visitors. Their reported tendency toward darker skin, which they often smeared with blubber, also repulsed many whites. Whereas a Shoshone or Mandan woman's clothing and appearance usually conformed to traditional expectations of long-haired, loosely-dressed, bejeweled and painted Indians, women of the Pacific Northwest tribes shocked whites with their naked, fully-tattooed bodies, noses pieced with whalebone, and oddly pointed, shaved heads. They were, wrote Lewis in his journal in 1806, "much more illy formed than the Indians of the Missouri and those of our frontier." While he described the Plains Indian women as "handsome and lively" and "disposed to be amorous," titillating the reader with comments about their lovely forms and aggressive sexual advances, he was repulsed by the bare breasts of the Columbia River tribeswomen. By leaving them "loose and unsuspended," he explained, they "grow to great length" and, in aged women, "I have seen the bubby reach as low as the waist." Clark concurred, writing "I think the most disgusting Sight I have ever beheld is those dirty naked wenches."[24]

California gold rushers and settlers were similarly disappointed about the "Digger" Indians of that region. "In personal appearance the Indians of California are, in general, small and weak," one correspondent wrote in an excerpt in the *Gazette of the Union* in 1849. They were, furthermore, "of a considerably darker color" than other Indian tribes, and "approach the hue of the negro," who they also resembled "in their large projecting lips, and broad, flat noses." Instead of leaving their hair long and flowing, they "commonly cut it off to the length of four or five inches, which makes it stick out like quills." They spent their time digging roots rather than hunting, and "turn their toes inward when walking," which gave them an ungainly waddle.[25] What emerges most pointedly from this description is a sense of disappointment. The reality of a small, squat, pigeon-toed, dark Indian with short, spiky hair did not at all conform to the romantic descriptions of "wild" Indians that had fueled American imaginations and built up their expectations. In a letter to the *Plymouth Rock* of his hometown, forty-niner Alfred Doten confessed his own disappointment that the California Indians did not match up to his beloved school-boy tales of "the Patagonians, of Tecumseh, and the Indian wars of the western frontier, and of Samoset, Assasiot and others of the noble tribes who our forefathers found," those who "present to one's mind the picture of the 'noble savage,' the 'Indian hunter,' tall, straight, and athletic."[26]

Besides the "noble savage" literature that informed these images in travelers' imaginations, the overwhelmingly positive descriptions of beautiful Indian women in travel accounts had fed expectations. In fact, most nineteenth-century accounts of ugly Indian women professed surprise, having been prepared by earlier reports to admire rather than reject them. The majority of travel accounts portrayed Indian women in very similar ways to quadroon women, even using the same descriptive adjectives, phrases, and colors to describe them. Indian women, too, have beautiful, "glowing" complexions, "voluptuous" forms, "bewitching," "flashing," and

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[24] Meriwether Lewis, January 6, 1806, in Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, *The Journals of Lewis and Clark*, Project Gutenberg, EBook #8419, http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8419/pg8419.html; Meriwether Lewis, March 19, 1806, in Ibid; Nicholas Biddle, ed, *History of the Expedition under the Command of Capts Lewis and Clark*, (New York: Allerton Book Company, 1906), 1: 65.

[25] "The Indians of California," 233.

[26] Alfred Doten, Letter No. 5 to the *Plymouth Rock*, written Feb 24, 1855, in Alfred Doten, *The Journals of Alfred Doten 1849—1903*, ed. Walter Van Tilburg Clark (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1973), 1: 206-207.

"languishing" dark eyes, an "elegance" and "grace" to their carriage, and "rich," "luxurious," "raven" hair.[27]

As in their descriptions of beautiful quadroons, white men were always eager to point out the lovely, surprisingly fair complexions of attractive Indian women. In one of the most popular travelogues of the decade, Captain Marryat wrote that the Shoshone women were "very superior," having "more similitude to the Arabian women than any other race."[28] As so-called "Hindoo" women were rather in vogue at this time, having been presented in various romances taking place in the harems of the Orient, this description associated Indian women with a beautiful, mysterious, and fittingly lighter-skinned exoticism.[29] They were similarly compared to other dark-skinned races like the Spanish or Italians, peoples who carried both the safety of a civilized, European ancestry and the allure of a supposed fiery nature.[30] The Comanche young women, Marryat asserted, were "but slightly bronzed; indeed the Spaniards of Andalusia and the Calabrians are darker than they are." Instead of being "dusky" or "sooty," beautiful Indian women resembled gleaming, precious metals. In his widely-read narrative of travels over the Santa Fe Trail, Lewis Gerrard attributed a similar kind of glowing, jewel-like quality to the skin when he described certain Indian women whose "fine complexions were eclipsed by a coat of flaming vermillion."[31] This reddish tint was actually due to a paint they lathered over their bodies, but the word choice connotes the hot flush of rapidly pulsing blood—the same kind of fiery passion that was often described as illuminating a quadroon's cheeks.

White men were also particularly taken with the beauty of Indian women's bodies, which they described as possessing fascinating, undulating curves. Many authors attributed this to Indian women's unrestrictive clothing, which allowed their bodies to blossom into admirable "voluptuousness." General Thomas James wrote in delighted awe of a group of Indian women who walked into the Mexican town of Santa Fe, reporting that they were "the best-formed persons I have yet seen in this country. . . extremely beautiful women, with fine figure and graceful, elegant carriage." The painter George Catlin loved to outline the graceful forms of the Gros Ventre women with his brush, rhapsodizing in his memoir about all the "beautiful and voluptuous-looking women" he painted who bestowed on him "bewitching smiles." A European painter, Rudolph Friedrich Kurz, proclaimed that Indian women's charms outdid all those of any other race. He had, he wrote provocatively, "delighted in sketching the Missouri maidens in the nude." Of course, he proudly stated, "I have been accustomed during my studies from life for many years to all that is finest in the human form," but "forms more beautiful than those I have found among the Iowa Indians I cannot imagine. . . . No individual of the white race can compare with them." Lewis Gerrard couldn't lay claim to an artist's vast knowledge of female nudes, but

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[27] As these descriptions are repeated in a wide range of travel and fictional literature, and will be individually quoted later in this chapter, I have chosen not to cite each one appearing here.

[28] Captain Marryat, *Narrative of the Travels and Adventures of Monsieur Violet in California, Sonora, & Western Texas* (Leipzig: Bernh. Tauchnitz, 1843), 55.

[29] A prime example of this kind of Oriental romance was Thomas Moore's supremely popular *Lalla Rookh,* published in 1817. In fact, several sources mentioned in this paper reference the book. In his 1855 diary, forty-niner Timothy Osborn compared a beautiful Spanish American lady to a woman in the novel's harem. In Lydia Maria Child's *A Romance of the Republic,* the quadroon character Rosabella, who has a "glowing Oriental beauty," is tellingly revealed to be reading *Lalla Rookh.*

[30] A more detailed explanation of the characteristics attributed to "Mediterranean" blood will appear in Chapter Six.

[31] Marryat, *Narrative,* 175-176; Lewis Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah and the Taos Trail: Or, Prairie Travel and Scalp Dances, with a Look at Los Rancheros From Muleback and the Rocky Mountain Campfire* (Cincinnati: H.W Derby & Co, 1850), 55-56.

he did profess a profound appreciation of Indian women's lack of corsets. Seeing the "daughters of the prairie dressed loosely," he admitted, was "a pleasing and desirable change from the sight of the pinched waists and constrained motions of the women of the States." He hastily added that his wish was not to dress all American women "*a la Cheyenne,"* as this was obviously "a costume forbidden by modesty" and "unfit for a civilized woman to wear," but he couldn't help suggesting that out West, "where novelty constitutes the charm, 't was indeed a relief to the eye."[32] Gerrard, like many other white men, recognized the enticements that the outer edges of civilization offered, unrestricted by confining clothing or the fetters of society's sexual standards.

That such freedom of dress might translate into freedom of spirit was suggested by descriptions of Indian women's loose, unbound hair and flashing, fiery eyes. While most white women braided and knotted their hair into painfully contorted, upswept hairdos or hid it under hats, Indian women often let theirs hang free. White men found this quite erotic: Captain Marryat wrote almost reverently of the Shoshone women's "soft and long raven hair" that fell "luxuriantly over their shoulder, usually ornamented with flowers, but sometimes with jewels of great value." But, just as with quadroons, Indian women's eyes were thought to be particularly suggestive. At his post in the Nipigon country, the trader Duncan Cameron wrote dreamily of the Indian women's "pretty black eyes, which they know very well how to humor in a languishing and engaging way whenever they want to please." Marryat attributed a romantic depth of passion to the Shoshone women, whose eyes were "dark and flashing, when excited, but otherwise mild, with a soft tinge of melancholy."[33]

While respectable white women were usually confined to the home and dissuaded from physical exertion, white men often professed great admiration for Indian women's athletic abilities, attributing them to the same free, wild spirit that infused their dress, hair, eyes and smiles. Captain Marryat loved to watch Shoshone women engaged in a hunt. "They ride as bravely as the men, [and] are very expert with the bow and arrow," he claimed. "Indeed to see one of these [Shoshone] young and graceful creatures, with her eyes sparkling and her face animated with the exercise of the chase, often recalled to the mind a nymph of Diana," the Roman goddess of the hunt. Admiring white travelers often described Indian women as otherworldly, mythological beings. Lewis Gerrard, for example, wrote of young squaws who "dashed furiously past" him on "wild steeds," evincing "an admirable daring, worthy of Amazons" and wearing loose-fitting, revealing dresses that gave them a "Diana look."[34] By evoking these mythological comparisons, authors could assign them an athleticism, wildness, and closeness to Nature that separated them from civilized white women and yet united them with attractive legends from a glorious, classical past. Furthermore, they called to mind a legendary past of wilderness odysseys and manly heroes beloved by goddesses—a fitting comparison for those idealizing their own, western odysseys among Indian "Dianas."

Comparisons with the ancient past also allowed for negative depictions. Indian society was thought to be organized along ancient, uncivilized lines that relegated a slave status to the women. Most Americans believed that a major indicator of the superiority of white civilization

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[32] Thomas James, *Three Years Among the Indians and Mexicans,* ed. Walter B. Douglas (1846; repr., St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society, 1916), 143; George Catlin, *Illustrations,* 1: 187; "Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz," 38; Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah,* 55-56.

[33] Marryat, *Narrative of the Travels and Adventures of Monsieur Violet,* 55; Louis Masson, *Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest: Récits de Voyages, Lettres et Rapports Inédits Relatifs au Nord-Ouest Canadien* (Québec: De L'Imprimerie Générale, 1890), 2: 247—248; Marryat, *Narrative,* 175—176.

[34] Marryat, *Narrative,* 55; Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah,* 55—56.

was the vaunted status it attributed to white women. The fact that many Indian women were saddled with the most demanding labor and taught to be entirely subservient to their demanding husbands was considered proof of their savage state. While accounts of Indian women's attractiveness were widespread, the most pervasive description was that of absolute drudgery. Almost all white accounts agreed that, despite their beauty, athleticism, and occasional displays of free spiritedness, Indian women were abused by their men. They were treated as property, bought and sold like cattle, forced to do all the hard labor, entirely subject to men's will and desire, and even denied the respectability of formal, monogamous marriage. In other words, Indian men were thought to treat Indian women exactly as white, American men treated their black slaves.

This depiction of female drudgery, then, was often contradictory. Many men listed it among the most loathsome aspects of Indian society, professing either disgust or pity for the women. Others used it as an excuse to claim that Indian women preferred white men, who, it was assumed, would treat them better. And still others seemed to see it as a distinct advantage, a way to obtain what was essentially a hard-working, perpetually submissive, and astonishingly cheap "fancy girl" in the western wilds.

"Through the whole of this strange land the dogs are all wolves—women all slaves—men all lords."[35]

Drudgery

It is certainly ironic that so many white American men professed such shock at the notion that Indian women were seen by their husbands "in the same light as any other part of his property, entirely at his disposal, possessing the Power of life and death over her."[36] After all, the American legal system in many states essentially made white wives the property of their white husbands, too. Similarly, many white men had no qualms about treating black men's wives—or their own, black concubines—as so much property to be bought, used up, and sold. However, this apparent hypocrisy can be slightly better understood if one considers Indian women's place in the complex hierarchy of race and gender by which white, American men structured society.

For one thing, Indians were generally considered to be racially superior to black slaves.[37] With skin color, hair, and facial features that seemed slightly closer to the "white" end of the racial spectrum, Indian women were considered more conventionally attractive than black women—indeed, far closer to the quadroon type. Their history, furthermore, was more complicated in the American mind: besides the fact that they had never been successfully enslaved on a large scale in British North America, their past had been rewritten in the

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[35] Catlin, *Illustrations*, 1: 60.

[36] Duncan M'Gillivary, *Journal of Duncan M'Gillivary of the Northwest Company at Fort George on the Saskatchewan, 1794-5*, ed Arthur S. Morton (Toronto: The MacMillan Company of Canada, Ltd., 1929), 33.

[37] Although Indians in some accounts were negatively described as being like "Negroes," most of those canvassed here found them to be racially superior. Thomas Jefferson's "Notes on the State of Virginia," for example, held that blacks were inherently inferior, but Indians were of a "noble" race capable of achieving full civilization. Colonial and antebellum laws upheld this hierarchy. Although American Indians were not granted the same rights as whites, they nonetheless possessed more than enslaved or free blacks—especially when they were considered to belong to sovereign, if dependent, Indian nations. See: George Frederickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 72-73; F. Michael Higginbotham, *Ghosts of Jim Crow: Ending Racism in Post-Racial America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 49.

nineteenth century to change previous villains like King Philip or Tecumseh into tragic heroes. For this reason, the portrayal of a kind of enslavement of Indian women could be seen as cruel and unnatural.

Secondly, as noted earlier, Indian women were often admired for their beauty, skills, and spirit. In respectable white society, beautiful, admirable femininity was to be placed on a pedestal, worshipped and adored. While the *de jure* reality might leave a white, American woman with such limited rights that she was, essentially, her husband's property, *de facto* cultural standards required that she be treated as a moral superior, protected and cherished by her husband. Only an uncivilized, savage environment, it was believed, would treat such models of femininity as inferiors, a virtually enslaved caste. The very fact that so many American men professed disgust with the system therefore suggests that some felt Indian women deserved a status similar to that of respectable white women. Indeed, the possibility of placing Indian women in this higher caste by making them models of domesticity was cited by policymakers as an incentive for the civilization program.[38]

In 1794, Scottish fur trader Duncan McGillivary asserted that the Indian women he encountered suffered "miserable conditions" as "slaves of the men." By 1832, not much had changed. Touring around a great variety of Indian tribes with paintbrush and palette in hand, George Catlin soberly wrote that the women were "always held in a rank inferior to that of men," "rather in the light of menials and slaves. . . . Through the whole of this strange land the dogs are all wolves—women all slaves—men all lords." White travelers watched in consternation as Indian women tilled the fields, skinned and prepared the game, manufactured everything from clothing to tools, set up and cleaned the tents, cooked all the food, cared for their children, tended to their men's every need, and even carried all their family's goods on their backs when traveling, trudging dutifully beside their mounted, unburdened husbands. In his 1856 report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs on the Conditions of the Upper Platte Agency, Thomas Twiss wrote that Indian men "are taught to look upon manual labor as degrading. . . . All menial services and labor are performed by women, who are real slaves to the men. The only education of the latter is on the war path, and the only labor the pursuit of game."[39]

What white men did not understand was that Indian men's own duties—hunting game, fighting wars, and protecting their villages—were also demanding. Whites did not comprehend that Indian men rode their horses beside their heavily-laden women because they were acting as protectors; should an enemy tribe or a dangerous animal happen upon the group while they traveled, an Indian warrior had to be unencumbered and astride a fast horse in order to best defend his family and possessions. What white men saw, however, was a feudal system in which the men smoked, ate, dawdled and played while their women slavishly waited on them. Even hunting and war-making were considered sporting or heroic adventures by many nineteenth-century white men.[40]

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[38] Theda Perdue's chapter "Catharine Brown: Cherokee Convert to Christianity," in *Sifters* presents a brief biography of a Cherokee woman who was successfully "civilized" and "domesticated" n this way. For more on Indian women's assimilation to "civilized" domesticity see: Jane E. Simonsen, *Making Home Work: Domesticity and Native American Assimilation in the American West, 1860-1919* (Greensboro: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

[39] Duncan M'Gillivary, *Journal*, 33; Catlin, *Illustrations*, 1: 60; Thomas Twiss, *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 34th Cong., 3rd Sess., 1856, House Doc. 1, serial 893, 642.

[40] For more on white men's misperceptions of Indian men's duties, see: Theda Perdue, "Native Women in the Early Republic: Old World Perceptions, New World Realities," in *Native Americans and the Early Republic.*

While professing great shock at what they saw as starkly unjust gender roles, many white men couldn't help portraying Indian men's lives as enviable paradises of masculinity. In 1823, John D. Hunter wrote a memoir of his young adulthood as a captive—and then an official member—of an Indian tribe. The authenticity of the memoir was—and still is—highly questioned, since many of his descriptions seem inaccurate or hyperbolized. Nonetheless, his account is interesting for its obvious knowledge of certain Indian traditions, and for the distinct possibility that it was written specifically to cater to reader's fantasies about Indian society.[41] For example, his descriptions of marriage conjured an image of Indian men living like pampered Roman emperors. "Whenever the husband requires any thing he has but to name it," Hunter explained, "and his squaw immediately complies with his wishes." Furthermore, this treatment extended "to his friends' individual wants and comforts," and Indian women were expected to anticipate all desires before they were even spoken. "The slightest deviation from this line of conduct on her part," Hunter asserted, "would be considered a just cause of offense," and the man would be completely justified in seeking a swift divorce. Even Indian women appeared to think this enslavement completely natural. Hunter insisted that "they do not think their task more severe than that of men," and even the dismayed Catlin admitted that "they seem to go industriously at [their duties], as if from choice or inclination, without a murmur." The army explorer Stephen Long even went so far as to suggest that the pride Indian women took in their work made them uniquely civilized. After listing a string of their responsibilities, Long observed that "they not only willingly performed [them] as a matter of duty, but they exhibited in their deportment a degree of pride and ambition to acquit themselves well; in this respect resembling a good housewife among the civilized fair."[42] Such a statement is quite provocative, suggesting not only that Indian women would be adept at accommodating to a civilizational program, but also that they could assimilate *among* the "civilized fair."

Perhaps the popularity of Hunter's memoir stemmed partly from the attractiveness of the male Eden he described. Washington Irving's *Adventures of Captain Bonneville* introduced very similar imagery in 1837. While Irving claimed that the book was his retelling of the real-life frontier adventures of Captain Bonneville himself, it smacks suspiciously of fiction. At one point, an Indian woman who flees to the white's camp to escape an abusive husband tells her tragic story in a way that both evokes the reader's pity and yet feeds into the illusion of Indian society as an attractive masculine utopia. "I was the wife of a Blackfoot warrior," Irving's woman tells the assembled travelers, "and I served him faithfully.

> I brought wood in the morning, and placed water always at hand. I watched for his coming; and he found his meat cooked and ready. . . . I searched the thought that was in his heart, to save him the trouble of speaking. When I went abroad on errands for him, the chief and warriors smiled upon me, and the young braves spoke soft things, in secret; but my feet were in the straight path, and my eyes could see nothing but him. When he went out to hunt, or to war who aided to equip him, but I? When he returned, I met him at the door; I took his gun; and he entered without further thought. While he sat and smoked, I

[41] A number of reviews of John Hunter's work openly questioned its authenticity. For example, see: *The British Magazine, or Miscellany of Polite Literature* (London: J. Robins and Co., 1823), 128.

[42] John D. Hunter, *Manners and Customs of Several Indian Tribes Located West of the Mississippi* (Philadelphia: J. Maxwell, 1823), 261; Catlin, *Illustrations*, 1: 121; Stephen Long, *Part One of James's Account of S.H. Long's Expedition, 1819-1820*," in vol. 14 of *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clarke Company, 1905), 198.

> unloaded his horses; tied them to the stakes; brought in their loads, and was quickly at his feet. If his moccasins were wet, I took them off and put on others which were dry and warm. I dressed all the skins he had taken in the chase. . . . When we halted in the evening, and he sat with the other braves and smoked, it was I that pitched his lodge; and when he came to eat and sleep, his supper and his bed were ready. . . . [But] I was his dog; and not his wife.[43]

It was socially correct for white men to protest this kind of treatment, especially when Indian women occupied a high enough place on the racial hierarchy to be afforded some small degree of respect. Yet it is also very clear that white men found reports of Indian women's astonishing work ethic, variety of abilities, and willingness to cater to male needs very attractive. After all, white men didn't simply stay at home, burying their noses in books like those by Hunt or Irving. Many were actually inspired to venture West to experience this life themselves.

As many travelers were quick to explain, Indian women were particularly accessible because they were so very cheap. As property, they could be traded or sold by their fathers or husbands—and Indian men appeared blithely eager to part with their women for even the cheapest of goods. George Catlin estimated the value of the most beautiful and modest Mandan girl to be equal to "two horses, a gun with powder and balls for a year, five or six pounds of beans, a couple of gallons of whiskey, and a handful of awls." Edwin Denig, a clerk at Fort Union who married two Assiniboine women, explained in an offhand way that "women among Indians are bought, paid for, and are the property of the purchaser the same as his horses." Many Indian men offered their daughters, sisters, or wives as "bedfellows" for a certain period of time. In return, as Canadian fur trader and explorer Alexander Henry wrote, "a mere trifle will satisfy them— even one single coat button."[44] This, however, was more a system of temporary hire. If a man wanted an actual Indian "wife"—as termed by her people, not by the church or civil rites that rarely made an appearance in Indian territory—he usually had to part with at least a horse. Nonetheless, such a bride-price was affordable to almost all white men regardless of class, and was repaid tenfold in the hard labor these Indian "wives" performed for their white husbands. Indeed, when compared to the expense of marriage to a respectable white woman—and her significantly shorter list of duties—it was an exceptional deal.[45]

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[43] Washington Irving, *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville in the Rocky Mountains and the Far West* (1849; repr., New York: G.P Putnam, 1862), 411—412.

[44] George Catlin, *Illustrations*, 1: 121; Edwin Denig, "Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri," in *46th Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, J.N.B Hewitt, ed. (Washington, D.C: 1930), 506; Elliot Coues, ed., *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest: The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson, 1799—1814* (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1897), 1: 342.

[45] It should here be mentioned that this system was far more complex than white men's perceptions would suggest. Among many tribes, the exchange of goods for women was like a reverse dowry. Whites usually saw only one part of the exchange. Historian Katherine Weist explains that "if the bride's family accepted the goods, mainly horses, thus agreeing to the marriage, an equal number of goods, if not more, were returned to the groom's family when the couple started living together. Cross-culturally, this type of exchange tends to be associated with an equality between the two kin groups rather than a ranked relationship of giver and receiver." Furthermore, certain of the transactions observed could have been the buying and selling of slave women, many of whom (including Sacajawea) were given or possibly sold to white traders. Katherine M. Weist, "Beasts of Burden and Menial Slaves: Nineteenth-Century Observations of Northern Plains Indian Women," in *The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women*, Patricia Albers & Beatrice Medicine, eds (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc, 1983), 44.

Just as with a "fancy" or quadroon concubine, a white man who purchased an Indian "wife" could enact a fantasy of ownership. A number of accounts detail relationships that strikingly mirror southern men's practices with their mixed-race mistresses. Fur company trading posts had extensive traditions of Indian harems. At York Place, one of the Hudson Bay Company's forts, Indian women were hauled in with the beaver pelts and buffalo robes amassed by the traders, and traded like any other good. According to Samuel Hearne, who chronicled his time there, Governor Moses Norton insisted on being the first to select "five of the finest" from this flesh market to add to his personal harem. Hearne himself seems to have had an entourage of Indian mistresses, though their price and quantity were some of his favored topics of complaint.[46]

Accounts from the Northwest Company were even more blunt, appearing like lists of market transactions or financial investments. At Fort Alexandria, Archibald Norman McLeod reported "I gave the Chef de Canard's widow to the amount of 28 plus, and took the Slave Woman, whom next fall I shall sell for a good price to one of the men." At Rainy Lake, Hugh Faries wrote that an Indian hunter he called "The Devil" had left the fort with "½ keg of rum, & a few goods, with 45 plus . . . for his daughter. Jourdain arrived from the Long Saut with 200 plus. On his arrival I gave him the Devil's daughter for 500lb Grand Portage Currency."[47]

These practices spanned all camps, whether European or American, and men of every nationality indulged. Indeed, the various rendezvous of the American mountain men, like Pierre's Hole, were said to be especially debauched. In the warm months, hundreds of men from the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and the American Fur Company met to trade their piles of winter furs and pour their profits into card games and revelry with Indian women, who inevitably gathered in hundreds of lodges alongside the camp. As historian Walter O'Meara fancifully described, "Plenty of dazzling girls were paraded in their snowy elkskins by fathers and brothers in the hope of entrapping some rum-dazed trapper in the coils of a prairie marriage."[48]

Harems of Indian women weren't just particular to fur trading camps; even the first settlers apparently found Indian women's accessibility, affordability, and exceptional abilities a necessary component of frontier life. In 1839, the Governor of California granted Swiss immigrant John Sutter permission to settle New Helvetica in the Sacramento Valley. European, American, Mexican and Indian settlers and laborers flocked to the area, establishing farms, mills, ranches and forts. Because so few women migrated, settlers of every nationality had to look to Indian women to satisfy their needs—matrimonial or otherwise. Although many pioneers and their biographers conveniently "forgot" to mention their Indian liaisons in later years, several memoirs point out that such relations were extremely prevalent and open.[49] Sutter himself was infamous for being, as his gardener Heinrich Lienhard asserted, "a typical Don Juan with women." Everyone knew about Sutter's harem, Heinrich explained, because he kept them in the anteroom adjoining his office. If Sutter's eye caught on a particularly lovely Indian wife, he simply bribed her husband until the latter was content to lend his lady at a moment's request. These "young Indian loafers who rarely worked," Lienhard wrote in thinly-veiled disgust, "were

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[46] Samuel Hearne, *A Journey from Prince of Wales' Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean in the Years 1769, 1770, 1771 and 1772*, ed., J.B Tyrrell (Toronto: Champlain Society Publication, 1911), 108.
[47] O'Meara, *Daughters of the Country*, 179, 240.
[48] Ibid., 169.
[49] Hurtado, *Intimate Frontiers,* 41.

fed and nicely clothed because their wives received special consideration from the master of the fort."[50]

With such a voracious appetite and so many beautiful and available Indian women around, Sutter's harem had a high rate of turnover. Lienhard explained that, as Sutter grew older, he seemed to prefer young Indian girls—some only ten or twelve years old. He therefore rid himself of his long-term Hawaiian mistress Manawitte, who had borne him several children, by unabashedly giving her to the man employed as majordomo at one of his farms. Sutter's women seem to have often been unceremoniously passed from hand to hand in the forts. According to some of the most famous accounts from New Helvetica's settlers, Indian wives or mistresses were to be had in abundance; authors gossiped gleefully about their neighbors' sins and were, in turn, exposed for their own philandering.[51] The American pioneer John Yates, for example, published the gossip that John Chamberlain, the blacksmith, was very much "given to gazing on the native females" and that "he had been married nineteen times to native women." But Yates himself had two Indian mistresses who caused a great scene when he attempted to oust them from his household after marrying a sixteen-year-old immigrant girl.[52] Whether labeled "wives," "mistresses," "bed-fellows," or "servants," Indian women were plentiful, cheap, widely useful, and easily exchangeable.

Of course, the freedom a man had to "own" as many Indian women as he could support also gave him added power over their bodies. Just as southern men found an erotic power in their total right to their human property, many frontiersmen seemed to relish wielding a master's privileges over their Indian women. After all, such treatment was accepted and even expected in many Indian societies. It was typical for fur traders to periodically whip their native wives, sometimes publicly. Fur trader Rudolph Friederich Kurz explained in his journal that "several sound lashings or other rough treatment" were essential to "keep alive" an Indian woman's "respect and affection."[53] In other words, Indian women were thought to be so deeply inundated with this belief in total male sovereignty that they equated masculinity with domestic violence. Such expectations certainly suited those men who ascribed to the culture of "aggressive masculinity." With their varied abilities, remarkable self-sufficiency, and total acceptance of an austere, violent, and uncertain lifestyle, Indian women seemed to suit many frontiersmen far better than white wives.

Despite the fact that many white men felt it completely acceptable to imitate Indian men's treatment of their women, almost all accounts agreed that Indian women felt positively pampered by white men. Their acknowledgment of white men's superior goods, wealth, and care—signifiers of their superior civilization—was cited as the reason for Indian women's constant pursuit of white men. Philippe Régis de Trobriand, an army officer at Fort Berthold, claimed in 1867 that the "great ambition of a young 'squaw' is to be the wife of a white man, for . . . . She is not subjected to exhausting work. . . . With a white man, they are better dressed, better cared for, better fed."[54] Irving's *Captain Bonneville* presented the same thesis, albeit in a

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[50] Marguerite Eyer Wilbur, trans., *A Pioneer at Sutter's Fort, 1846—1850: The Adventures of Henrich Lienhard* (Los Angeles: The Califia Society, 1941), 76.
[51] Ibid., 76—77; Hurtado, *Intimate Frontiers,* 41
[52] John Yates, "Sketch of a Journey in the Year 1842 from Sacramento California through the Valley by John Yates of Yatestown," MS, Bancroft Library, Berkeley.
[53] "Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz," 155.
[54] Philippe Régis de Trobriand, *Military Life in Dakota: The Journal of Philippe Régis de Trobriand,* trans. Lucille M Kane (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1951), 84.

far more romantic fashion designed to appeal to readers hungry for descriptions of love affairs between dashing frontier adventurers and beautiful Indian maidens. An "Indian belle" Irving portrays has magnificent, plaited hair "made to fall with seeming negligence over either breast," robes "of the finest texture that can be procured," and leggings and moccasins "of the most beautiful and expensive workmanship, and neatly fitted to foot and ankle, which with the Indian women are generally well-formed and delicate." This lovely creature of "native grace" then "vaults into the saddle of her gay, prancing steed, and is ready to follow her mountaineer 'to the last gasp of love and loyalty.'" Such intense devotion, Irving explains, derives from the fact that "The free trapper combines, in the eye of an Indian girl, all that is dashing and heroic in a warrior of her own race, whose gait, garb, and bravery he emulates, with all that is gallant and glorious in the white man." Most importantly, "the indulgence with which he treats her, the finery in which he decks her out, the state in which she moves" contrast so markedly with the alternate choice "of being a drudge and slave of an Indian husband" that "there is no comparison, in the eyes of an aspiring belle of the wilderness, between a free trapper and an Indian brave."[55]

Whether they complained, praised, or took advantage of Indian women's slave-like status, almost all white authors admired their exceptional domestic abilities. They may indeed have been "drudges," but white men were persistently amazed at how *good* they were at uncomplainingly juggling all their duties. While some accounts certainly did include negative portrayals of Indian women as unemotional, plodding workhorses that mirror depictions of black slaves, many others admired the women for being devoted to their households and families. In many accounts, the hard work an Indian woman put into harvesting, cooking, and maintaining a clean home was seen to translate into gentle, nurturing motherliness and conjugal love and loyalty.

"The maternal fondness appears also to be not less exquisite than we perceive it to be with civilized mothers."[56]

Domestic Goddesses

In his account of his travels along the Columbia River in the 1830s, British traveler Ross Cox consistently mentioned that women of several tribes were models of femininity. "The Spokane women are good wives and most affectionate mothers," he wrote, and later asserted that the Flatheads, too, "are excellent wives and mothers, and their character for fidelity is so well established, that we never heard an instance of one of them proving unfaithful to her husband." While he acknowledged that some tribes had problematic vices, Cox appears to have been far more interested in presenting a favorable picture of the Indian race in general. Perhaps he even felt that Indian women's superior domestic talents were inherent, for he wrote that even the "half-breed women" were "excellent wives and mothers, and instances of improper conduct are rare among them. . . . perhaps fewer cases of infidelity occur among them than among any equal portion of females in the civilised world."[57] In fact, Cox's entire account reads almost like an

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[55] Irving, *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville*, 135-36; 405.

[56] Edwin James, *Account of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains, Performed in the Years 1819, 1820*, (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees Orme and Brown, 1823), 1: 223.

[57] Ross Cox, *The Columbia River; Or, Scenes and Adventures of a Residence of Six Years on the Western Side of the Rocky Mountains, Among Various Tribes of Indians Hitherto Unknown* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1832), 2: 115, 135, 343—344.

advertisement for Indian wives. As well as making assertions about various tribes' exceptional women, he mentioned many happy, successful marriages between Indian women and white men.

White men also seemed fascinated by Indian women's raw displays of emotion, especially during funeral rites. Many tribes had mourning rituals that involved self-mortification, loud lamentations, fasting, and even suicide. Other tribes had funeral traditions that included frequent visits to a loved-one's grave or shrine, where offerings of food, conversation, and care were considered daily needs for the dead as much as the living. In his account of an expedition to the Rocky Mountains in the 1820s, Edwin James wrote that the death of a husband traditionally caused an Indian woman such intense misery that she forfeited all earthly comforts. Widows gave all their possessions to neighbors and left the village to build themselves small, stark shelters of grass or bark. Then, he explained, "they mortify themselves by cutting off their hair, scarifying their skin, and . . . lament[ing] incessantly. . . . This lamentation and mortification, which the squaws impose upon themselves, continue for a period of six to eight months, or even a year."[58] Even after the mourning period, Indian women's grief and devotion appeared to continue. When staying with the Mandans, for example, Catlin observed that the tribe arrayed the skulls of their loved ones in sacred areas. Wives and mothers of the deceased visited these skulls almost every day, bringing them lovingly-prepared foods and "talking to [them] in the most pleasant and endearing language that they can use." Sometimes, he wrote, a woman may stay so long that "overcome with fatigue, [she] falls asleep, with her arms encircled around [the skull]."[59] White American culture, of course, had its own mourning traditions, including certain rules about the garb, diet, and recreations suitable for widows. The extremes to which Indian women appeared to take their mourning traditions, however, must have seemed at once shocking and romantic. This, after all, was the period in which the culture of sentimentalism was flourishing, and popular books, poetry, and artwork glorified intense female emotion. Even for men who ascribed to the culture of "aggressive masculinity" and shunned this aspect of Victorianism, such apparent evidence of Indian women's deepest passions must have been fascinating.

Travel literature often indulged in tales of Indian women's remarkable love, loyalty, or bravery that were, according to the author, "true stories," but which smack of European tales like *Romeo and Juliet.* In order to assure his readers that the grieving rituals he described were true displays of real emotion, Edwin James wrote that "Many circumstances tend to show that the squaw is susceptible of the most tender and permanent attachment to an individual of the opposite sex." In fact, he continued, on occasions when an Indian woman had been denied such love, "the consequences have sometimes been fatal." As though determined to provide evidence by numbers, James insisted that "*several* instances came to our knowledge, of a young female committing the act of suicide after marriage with a person, in obedience to the will of her parents, whilst her affection were devoted to another."[60] Washington Irving's romanticized account of Captain Bonneville's travels similarly emphasized the prevalence of such Indian Juliets. Besides mentioning numerous Indian women who left their families and tribes to "follow the fortunes" of their lovers, Irving related the story of a young, beautiful wife of an old, spiteful chief. Knowing of a secret but unconsummated love affair between his wife and one of his warriors, the chief stripped the young man of his status and humiliated him before the entire

[58] James, *Account of an Expedition,* 1: 223.
[59] Catlin, *Illustrations,* 1: 91.
[60] James, *Account of an Expedition,* 1: 223. My italics.

tribe. In revenge, the warrior killed the chief and asked his young wife to run away with him. "Kosato shall not go alone!" cried the brave woman. "Wherever he goes I will go—he shall never part from me." Irving finished the story by commenting that it was "of a kind that often occurs in Indian life, where love elopements from tribe to tribe are as frequent as among the novel-read heroes and heroines of sentimental civilization."[61] Such an explanation suggests that Indian life was considered to be as romantic and exciting as sentimental novels, and that Indian men and women were thought to be as courageous and passionate as the heroes of contemporary romances. This notion, of course, could lead readers to draw the conclusion that Indian society was therefore far more thrilling and desirable than their own staid, civilized world.

Rather than portray these excesses of emotion as opposite to "civilized" restraint and order, however, many authors pointed to such profound sentimentality as proof that Indian women were, in one sense, equal to whites. Edwin James wrote that "the maternal fondness" among Indian women "appears also to be not less exquisite than we perceive it to be with civilized mothers." He then relayed a story that appears to have been so popular among white travelers—or among the literary public—that it reappeared in a number of other accounts. Beginning his tale in a way that immediately elevated the Indian heroine to a status similar to that of a white, upper-class woman, James wrote that in 1814, "a trader married a beautiful squaw of one of the most distinguished families in the Omawhaw nation." The alliance, James explained, was created because the man "needed the trading connections such kin would give him." He therefore never felt the need to visit his Indian wife for more than a brief portion of the year. Knowing that her husband had his own white wife and preferred to live among his own people, the Indian woman nevertheless remained a most devoted and loving spouse. Every day she would venture with her daughter—born in her husband's absence—to the river so as to catch the earliest glimpse of his return. When the trader finally met his daughter, he decided that she was such a charming, lovely young girl that he wished to bring her back with him to white society. He had not, however, reckoned with his Indian wife's intense devotion. "Her maternal fondness overpowered her," James wrote, "and she ran crying and screaming along the riverside in pursuit of the boat, tearing out her long flowing hair, and appearing to be almost bereft of reason." In traditional Indian fashion, when she returned home without her daughter "she gave away everything she possessed, cut off her hair, went into deep mourning, and remained inconsolable."[62]

When the trader returned, he wounded her even more deeply by presenting her with his new white wife and ordering her to depart. Even this did not daunt the faithful Indian woman, who, James reported, "departed without a murmur, as it is not unusual with the Omawhaws to send off one of their wives, on some occasions, while they remain with the favorite one." With a devotion and trust that must have awed white readers, the Indian wife simply waited patiently for her husband to "recall her," and spent her time caring for the son that had been born in her husband's absence. When the man finally called for her, she was "overjoyed with what she supposed to be her good fortune," and "lost no time in presenting herself before the husband whom she tenderly loved." The white man, however, appeared incapable of appreciating this woman's miraculous virtues, and simply informed her that he was "cast[ing] her off and demanded she surrender the [son]." Her motherly devotion, however, was the one bond stronger

[61] Irving, *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville,* 167.
[62] James, *Account of an Expedition,* 1: 226—228.

than her love for her husband. Stating that she could not possibly be parted from her child, she insisted "I will remain with him; I can find some hole or corner into which I may creep, in order to be near him and sometimes to see him. If you will not give me food, I will, nevertheless, remain until I starve before your eyes." Even after her abysmal treatment, she insisted that she had promised herself to her husband for life, and demanded "is not my right paramount to that of your other wife? . . . It is true her skin is whiter than mine, but her heart cannot be more pure towards you, nor her fidelity more rigid."[63]

The tale seems a profound tragedy precisely because the reader is meant to side with the Indian woman, to believe that she is a paragon of feminine virtue who must certainly be equal to any white wife. The white husband therefore appears the villain because, ironically, he obeyed the very rules that structured white society's racial hierarchy, keeping his Indian wife at a distance and ultimately replacing her with a white woman. A tale like this suggested that such social strictures were ignorant, cruel, and unfair to those Indian women who perfectly fit the ideal of the "cult of true womanhood." It also, of course, suggested that Indian women were even more devoted to their husbands and children than white women, and devoid of jealousy, impatience, or selfish demands.

Besides evidencing some of the very qualities that were sought in ideal white wives, Indian women were also depicted as having a steely fortitude and bravery that was essential for a wife of the western wilds. After all, the parlor manners, cloistered lifestyle, and delicate sensibilities expected of respectable white women were simply impossible in a world frequently torn asunder by raids, rapes, kidnappings, wars, famines, and all the freaks of man, weather, and nature. Many travelogues therefore admiringly chronicled the stoicism and courage of Indian women, who had adapted to the harsh lands far before the arrival of white men. The stories of pluck and daring rather strikingly mirror the romantic literature about "tragic mulattas" mentioned in the previous chapter. Ironically, the dangers that surrounded non-white women because of their racial status seem to have transformed many into glamorous heroines admired by the very society that shunned them.

Ross Cox, for example, narrated a story about the Indian wife of a trapper who was told that an enemy tribe had killed her husband and was on its way to her hut. "With that courage and self-possession of which few Indian women are devoid in times of necessity," Cox wrote, she fled. Catching two horses, she piled her children and some supplies on their backs and raced off to a friend's cabin, where a scene of devastation, "a smoking ruin, with fresh marks of blood scattered all around," deeply shocked her. "Her fortitude, however, did not forsake her," and she concealed her children in the trees and "armed herself with a tomahawk and a large knife." She held vigil amidst the smoke and blood stains all night, returning to her children just in time to save them from a ferocious, ravenous wolf pack. After killing her two horses and hunkering down in the abandoned cabin all winter, she managed to keep her children from starving until she finally found refuge with a friendly tribe.[64] Such a story suggested that, out in the western wilds where all the men were tyrannical lords and all the dogs were wolves, an Indian wife was the best security for one's children.

Such stories bring up confusing contradictions. Were Indian women free, beautiful Amazons or enslaved, plodding drudges? Were they brave and heroic or meek, obedient, and downtrodden? Could an Indian wife be counted on to be submissive, domestic, devoted and loyal

[63] Ibid., 1: 226—228.
[64] Cox, *The Columbia River*, 2: 253—256.

to her family while still managing to conjure a ferocious fighting spirit when the latter was threatened? Or were Indian women simply too alien to understand, too uncivilized and swayed by the winds of their own exorbitant passions? Travel literature appears to have been extremely torn over these conclusions—especially when addressing the issue of sexuality. In these portrayals, the Pocahontas/squaw dichotomy emerges more starkly than ever. Writers seemed determined to view each tribe in purely black and white terms: either as lascivious, revolting, and promiscuous, or almost tyrannically chaste and virtuous. No matter what stance they took, the amount of time authors of travel literature spent discussing Indian women's sexuality indicates their intense fascination with the subject, as well as the lack of any real consensus.

"They were all courtesans, a set of handsome tempting women"[65]

Sexuality

Accounts of the sexual practices of various tribes are often so drastically different that a reader often wonders whether the authors truly visited the same set of people, or whether some cataclysmic event suddenly caused major changes in those peoples' lives and customs. Authors never bothered with subtleties. Either the entire tribe was astonishingly chaste, or everyone was a prostitute; there was never any acknowledgement of varying sexual practices *within* a tribe. In his 1825 *Narrative of an Expedition to the Source of St. Peter's River*, William Keating reported that chastity in the Ojibway tribe was "a thing of high repute," without which "no woman could expect to be taken to wife by a warrior." In a journal he published in 1822, fur trapper Daniel Harmon wrote that "chastity in young women is considered as a virtue by the Indians generally, on the east side of the Rocky Mountains." Indeed, many tribes had customs that mirrored the puritanical restrictions of the southern aristocracy, with many mothers who "are so particular that they never allow their daughters who have arrived at a certain age, to go from home alone, but always send some person with them as a protector. . . . [They] sit down in a decent attitude, with their knees close to each other."[66]

But many other writers found other tribes, especially among the Plains Indians, to be shockingly loose with their sexual traditions and moral standards. "They were all courtesans," Canadian explorer David Thompson wrote dismissively in his journals, "a set of handsome tempting women . . . . The curse of the Mandanes is an almost total want of chastity." In his 1856 account entitled *Five Indian Tribes*, fur trapper Edwin Denig agreed that "the women, whether married or not, appear to be perfectly unaware that virtue or chastity has any existence even in the imagination." Most revoltingly, sex was carried on in the same careless fashion as any other daily activity. "Their conduct in these matters is carried on in broad daylight," Denig wrote despairingly, "without any regard to bystanders or lookers on. Indeed, it would appear that they are as destitute of the ideas of decency or modesty as any part of the brute creation."[67]

Accounts were so contradictory in nature that many authors felt it their duty to correct others. In his report of his travels along the Columbia River, for example, Ross Cox insisted that

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[65] Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative,* 234.

[66] William Keating, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Source of St. Peter's River, Lake Winnepeek, Lake of the Woods, &c. &c. Performed in the Year 1823* (Philadelphia: H.C. Carey & I. Lea, 1824), 2: 169—170; Daniel Harmon, *A Journal of Voyages and Travels in the Interior of North America* (New York: Allerton Book Co., 1822), 295.

[67] Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative,* 234; Edwin Denig, *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri: Sioux, Arickaras, Assiniboines, Crees, Crows,* ed. John C. Ewers (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 152—53.

"in proportion as we approach the rapids from the sea, female impurity becomes less perceptible; beyond this point it entirely ceases." This fact was "necessary to mention," he explained, because of "the sweeping censure passed by Lewis and Clarke on all the women between the Rocky Mountains and the sea." Cox therefore assumed his readers had read the explorers' accounts. Careful not to deny the literary public their favorites, he insisted that "the reader must not suppose that I wish to cast any doubt on the general accuracy of those intelligent travellers; . . . the immense fund of correct and valuable information contained in their journal is surprising; but in this instance they have wandered from the fact."[68]

Lewis and Clark's work may have been relatively influential—although definitive records of their readership are hard to obtain—but reports of Indian women's lasciviousness had been prevalent from the very first European encounters. Amerigo Vespucci's account of his encounter with the Indian peoples of Brazil became a kind of best-seller in its time, and was re-printed throughout the centuries. His report was rather predictable: seeing their relative nudity, polygamous practices, and beauty rituals involving the mortification of various body parts, Vespucci came to the conclusion that they were all "very libidinous," The Brazilian women, Vespucci reported, were so "lustful" that they "caus[ed] the private parts of their husbands to swell up to. . a huge size," a trick they accomplished by subjecting the penis to the bite of poisonous animals. This, Vespucci announced, caused many men to "lose their organs which break through lack of attention, and they remain eunuchs." Apparently, the practice turned out to be remarkably fortuitous for white men with intact penises, since Vespucci insisted that when Indian women " had the opportunity of copulating with Christians, urged by excessive lust, they defiled and prostituted themselves." This was a positive thing, he explained, because the women "have bodies which are tolerably beautiful and cleanly." The "excellence of their bodily structure" meant that one could find none with "a flabby breast" nor any sign at all to "distinguish . . . [them] from virgins."[69] Since the early sixteenth century, then, white men had been simultaneously shocked by and attracted to Indian women's supposedly novel sexuality. And, since the sixteenth century, white men had consistently misunderstood Indian traditions and associated their behavior with lasciviousness and prostitution.

Even men who professed to ascribe to the culture of "aggressive masculinity" had still been imbued with certain, western cultural standards that dictated "correct" and "incorrect" morality, "lewd" and "chaste" behavior. In nineteenth-century Europe and America, these standards remained remarkably similar throughout varying social classes. Clothing was intended to cover the body as much as possible; women who revealed too much skin were immediately flagged as prostitutes. Sex was a topic suitable only for private discussion; the lower classes might indulge in raucous jokes about it, but in general it was not a topic for women's ears. It was certainly not a public *action,* either, and even streetwalkers—some of the most desperate of prostitutes—plied their business in darkened corners and empty alleyways. Soliciting or accepting money for sex was solely the reserve of prostitutes. Finally, marriage was at least to have the semblance of monogamy: a man was to keep his own extramarital affairs private, and under no circumstances was he to offer up his own wife for another's pleasure.

It was no surprise, then, that various tribal traditions appeared to many travelers as signs of blatant prostitution and universal promiscuity. The first thing a traveler noticed was the Indians' apparent disregard for clothing. For men in many tribes, bare chests and legs even in the

[68] Cox, *The Columbia River,* 2: 135-136.
[69] Vespucci quoted in Berkhofer, 7—10.

depths of winter were signs of stoic masculinity and a warrior spirit. While many authors commented admiringly on the beautiful, ornamented female clothing in many Indian tribes, they nonetheless noted the lack of corsets or undergarments, and the prevalence of bare legs and arms. This, however, was to be preferred to those Indian tribes that allowed their women to wander about with only a small skirt, their breasts completely exposed and even—to travelers' gawking amazement—painted or tattooed. Of course, in the sweltering summer months the Indians must have been just as astonished to see Anglos bundled in multiple layers as the travelers were to see native men and women almost entirely unclothed. Yet to most Europeans and Americans, the tendency of many Indian women to pluck their body hair, lather their naked skin with paint and grease, and intricately tattoo their bodies was akin to prostitutes' habit of shaving their genitals and painting their faces. In most parts of nineteenth-century Europe and America, makeup was severely frowned upon and considered a flaunting of female sexuality.[70]

Nonetheless, as many white travelers noticed, many Indian women did not at all seem ashamed to expose their breasts and coat their bodies with enticing oils and designs. In fact, many Indian women were as shockingly open in their speech as in their dress. Meriwether Lewis wrote in his journal that men and women along the Northwest Coast often chattered familiarly with each other "of their every part, and of the most familiar connection." When the future king of France, Louis-Phillipe, made his tour of the American West and stayed with the Cherokee tribe, he was amazed to see the nonchalant way the tribe's women responded to his lustful trail guide. Apparently as at ease in the women's tent as he would have been in a brothel, the guide made persistent sexual advances to several women right in front of Louis-Phillipe. But "they were so little embarrassed," wrote the bemused Frenchman, "that one of them who was lying on a bed put her hand on his trousers before my very eyes and said scornfully, *Ah, sick.*"[71] Clearly, among these Cherokee women, sexual talk—about the merits of a penis or the act itself—was a plain and perfectly open subject.

Such freedom of sexual speech often translated into bawdy, playful actions. The early nineteenth-century botanist John Bradbury, for example, encountered a group of high-spirited Gros Ventre women when he and his fellow travelers were in a canoe. The women ran down the shore and carelessly stripped off their clothes, leaping into the water and beginning to play "a number of mischievous tricks." They splashed the canoeists with water, snatched their paddles out of their hands, and shoved the canoe off course. While Bradbury admitted an initial shock—no respectable white woman would ever so nonchalantly cast off her clothes, much less engage in watersports—he quickly became rather enchanted. In a land seemingly lacking in taboos, such playful behavior between men and women must have seemed refreshing and novel. Instead of paddling away or berating the women, Bradbury and his men joined in the fun, leaping out of the canoe, staggering up the shore, and running off to hide the women's cast-off clothing.[72]

Of course, the liberties Indian women took with their sexuality were not simply limited to playful jaunts. White travelers were consistently amazed at the way Indian women openly solicited sex. In some tribes, Indian women were encouraged both to initiate sexual advances and

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[70] Perdue, "Native Women in the Early Republic," 90.

[71] Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed, *Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1804—1806* (New York, 1904-5), 3: 315; Louis-Philippe [King of France], *Diary of My Travels in America*, trans. Stephen Becker (New York: Delacorte Press, 1977), 84-85.

[72] John Bradbury, *Travels in the Interior of America in the Years 1809, 1810, and 1811*, 2nd ed. (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1819), 160-161.

to enjoy multiple sexual partners before marriage.[73] In *Notes on the State of Virginia,* Thomas Jefferson attempted to explain the apparent "frigidity" of Indian men as "the effect of manners, and not a defect of nature." Men were expected to reserve their ardor for warfare rather than displays of romantic affection, and this, Jefferson explained, meant that "a celebrated warrior is oftener courted by the females, than he has occasion to court." He wrote that "instances similar to Ruth and Boaz are not uncommon among them," referencing the biblical story in which Ruth offered herself to the rich landowner, Boaz, and was rewarded with marriage rather than ostracism. The eighteenth-century French explorer Jean Bernard Bossu reported that "when an unmarried brave passes through the village, he hires a girl for a night or two, as he pleases, and her parents find nothing wrong with this." This, Bossu explained, was because parents traditionally told a daughter "that her body is hers to do with as she wishes." A decade later, American explorer Jonathan Carver wrote that women "before they are married are not the less esteemed for the indulgence of their passions."[74]

Many of these reports were made before whites had established a significant presence in the West, so not all sexual practices can be attributed to the arrival of Europeans and Americans. Nonetheless, it is clear that Indians' sexual practices evolved and adapted to the white migration and all its accompanying wealth, economic opportunities, disease, and sexual appetites. When famine, disease, or poverty ravaged an Indian community—often a direct result of white interaction—sexual relations could be a matter of survival. Pierre-Antoine Tabeau, the Canadian fur trader, explorer, and assistant to Louis and Clark, wrote in his published journal that the desperate Bois Brulés women offered "their favors" for just a few mouthfuls of dried meat or soup. Other women found that sexual liaisons gave them unprecedented opportunities in a new market economy that was developing with the arrival of the whites and their coveted goods. While Indian men often had furs, meats, animals, goods or slaves to trade, women most often had to rely on their sexual charms to procure their desires. The future king of France, Louis-Philippe, recalled ruefully that "all Cherokee women are public women in the full meaning of the

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[73] In the Cherokee tribe, for example, premarital sexual freedom extended to some degree to the post-marital state, and the extent to which Cherokee women cuckolded their husbands elicited frequent comments from European observers. See: Laura Klein and Lillian Ackerman, eds, *Women and Power in Native North America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 222. In a number of Comanche and Ute tribes, the girl was expected to initiate courting. In Ute culture, a woman in a Bear Dance might make a pass at a man by throwing a stick or a stone into his lap, as a signal that she wished him to visit her later that night. In Comanche culture, as well, it was proper for a girl to seek out a man for a sexual encounter. One typical practice was crawling into his tipi at night, or leaving hers to meet him at a pre-arranged place. In Natchez culture, maidens expected and received generous presents from all their lovers, and a girl's reputation rested not on her chastity but on the size of the dowry she was able to amass by her freedom and desirability in her various sexual liaisons. When an unmarried Huron girl got pregnant, all her lovers came claiming to be the husband, and she chose the one she liked best. See Carolyn Niethammer, *Daughters of the Earth: The Lives and Legends of American Indian Women*, (New York: Collier Books, 1977), 59, 67, 68.

[74] Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Boston: Lilly and Wait, 1832), 212; Seymour Feiler, ed, *Jean-Bernard Bossu's Travels in the Interior of North America, 1751-1762* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1962), 131-132; Jonathan Carver, *Travels in Wisconsin* (1779; repr., New York: Harper & Brothers, 1838), 160. It should also here be noted that, while the majority of tribes were reported to have less stringent rules against premarital sex than white societies, and while many allowed or expected women to make sexual advances to men, a number of other tribes had strict requirements of premarital chastity. The Apache tribe was most notable for this. Apache women were taught to be reserved and bashful, and boys were told it was unmanly to pay too much attention to women. Any show of affection in public between males and females was laughed at. Apache girls were expected to remain chaste before marriage, and those who did not could expect a public whipping by their fathers. See Neithammer, *Daughters of the Earth*, 58.

phrase: dollars never fail to melt their hearts." Among many tribes, a kind of specialized occupation evolved: the "trading girls." These young women were, essentially, lubricants for market transactions. They were offered to seal or sweeten deals, in exchange for coveted goods, or simply in the hopes of keeping white men—and their goods—in the camps for a little longer. Patrick Gass, a member of the Lewis and Clark expedition, recalled a Chinook woman who essentially acted as a madame for nine "trading girls," frequently turning them loose on the white men's quarters and, presumably, skimming the earnings.[75]

Many white travelers, however, could not countenance the notion that Indian women were fully responsible for their sexual actions. In fact, the majority of travel literature tended to place the blame on Indian men, who were often portrayed as persistent, careless pimps of their daughters, sisters, and wives. Many travelers noticed that while a number of tribes had exceptionally harsh punishments for female adultery (including beating, maiming, and even death), it was entirely permissible for husbands to *invite* other men to share their wives. Pierre-Antoine Tabeau wrote in his journal that any sexual affair "that meets with his approval, . . . is not offensive" to an Indian man, "who would kill or at least turn out his wife upon the slightest suspicion," but who "prostitutes her himself for a very small reward."[76] Such conduct was, of course, in keeping with the notion that all Indian women were slaves to their men, their sexuality simply another tool that could be used or hired out.

White travelers usually explained this strange conduct in one of two ways: either as a selfish, pecuniary incentive or a magnanimous display of hospitality. According to the 1811 journal of journalist and future congressman Henry Marie Brackenridge, Indian women were treated as "mere articles of traffic." When the tents of his fellow travelers (trappers of the Missouri Fur Company) went up at dusk, the plain became "crowded with these wretches . . . fathers brought their daughters, husbands their wives, brothers their sisters, to be offered for sale at this market of indecency and shame." This revolting behavior, Brackenridge wrote, was different "from any people I had ever heard of; perhaps something may be attributed to the inordinate passion which had seized them for our merchandize." But many travelers commented in confusion and surprise about the paltry "trifles" Indian men accepted in exchange for their women. The Canadian fur trapper Jean-Baptiste Trudeau couldn't understand why the most desirable women—"the youngest and most beautiful daughters, sisters, and wives" were given to the white men in exchange for the pettiest goods. William Clark noted that wives were given to total strangers for a night for just a "trifling present," and that the loan could be extended for as long as the borrower wished, provided the "value of the present" was slightly increased.[77] To white men, women were property of the highest value, since in white society a woman's social reputation and marital worth rested on her chastity and faithfulness. Surely, white men thought, a man would only prostitute his women if he were in dire need of something, or if she were already sullied and worthless. Why, then, did they demand only the most insignificant of prices for even their most highly desirable women?

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[75] Annie Heloise Abel, ed., *Tabeau's Narrative of Loisel's Expedition to the Upper Missouri* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1939), 73. Louis-Philippe, *Diary of Travels*, 72; Patrick Gass, *A Journal of the Voyages and Travels of a Corps of Discovery, Under the Command of Captain Lewis and Captain Clarke* (Pittsburgh: David M'Keehan, 1808), 275.

[76] Tabeau, *Tabeau's Narrative,* 178-179.

[77] Brackenridge, *Journal of a Voyage*, 130; Jean-Baptiste Trudeau, "Trudeau's Journal," in *South Dakota Historical Collections*, (Pierre, South Dakota: State Publishing Company, 1914), 7: 461.Biddle, *History of the Expedition*, 256.

A number of travelers decided that the reason had less to do with greed and more to do with alien cultural traditions. Rather than being a trading opportunity, the loan was therefore described as a "compliment" or a "the first token of their friendship and hospitality."[78] Henry Marie Brackenridge acknowledged that the "traffic" in "bedfellows" he described was sometimes explicable as "part of their hospitality," and warned that "to decline such an offer is considered as treating the host with some disrespect." Alexander Henry the Younger was similarly amazed by this complicated social etiquette, writing in his journal that Indian men offered their wives to strangers "without solicitation," and are greatly "offended if their favors are not accepted," so that the would-be recipient must "convince [them] that there is some good reason for our refusal, and that it is not out of contempt." Should the offer be accepted, Henry was astonished to find that Indian men were "very complaisant in giving him the choice of their women, and proud when they can accommodate him with one who is provided with a good swinging pair of contrevents, or well labiated."[79] Clearly, the value of these women was not perceived in pecuniary terms, but rather as a reflection of the status, generosity, and good fortune of their men.

The real reasons for such traditions varied from tribe to tribe, and among individuals. Certainly, some men used their women's bodies to obtain coveted goods, and others to establish ties of friendship and benevolence with desired trading partners. And certainly many women acted of their own volition, seeking out sexual relations with or without their family's consent. The root of the actions, however, was embedded in an entirely different understanding of sex. As anthropologist Alice B. Kehoe writes, "Native peoples often imbued sex with different meaning from Europeans, who copulated for pleasure and procreation." While Indians certainly had sex for these reasons as well, the act also took on another, potent meaning: it was viewed as a transfer of spiritual power, and therefore often "a spiritual experience rather than a physical one."[80] This explains why so many Indian ceremonies involved copulation. One of the most famous examples—both among nineteenth-century readers of travel literature and among modern anthropologists—was the Mandan Buffalo Ceremony described by members of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

In 1803, Pierre-Antoine Tabeau wrote that the explorers' party had spent the whole winter with the friendly Mandan tribe. As a symbol of their good relations, the Mandans invited their guests to participate in a sacred ceremony that was intended to encourage a buffalo herd to come within easy hunting range. Everyone piled into a lodge and gathered around a ceremonial fire. To the white travelers' great alarm, all the old, Indian men began to strip naked. The young warriors then approached their nude elders with their wives in tow, entreating them to choose any they desired. According to Tabeau, the old men began to "touch [the women], bellow, roar, paw the earth, strike it with their heads and make dust flu," just as though they were buffalo bulls in heat. Once the old men had made their selections, the young wives led them outside and had sex with them under the open prairie sky. When the old men stumbled back into the lodge,

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[78] Jonathan Carver said "complimenting a stranger with the company of their wives" was standard practice among Indians of North America. Later, Sir George Simpson said "The offer of their wives and daughters is the first token of their friendship and hospitality." See O'Meara, *Daughters of the Country,* 145.

[79] Brackenridge, *Journal of a Voyage,* 123-30; Coues, *New Light,* 1: 342, 348. By "well-labiated," Henry was referring to the practice of a number of Indian tribes of piercing, distending, or otherwise manipulating the female labia.

[80] Alice B. Kehoe, "The Function of Ceremonial Sexual Intercourse among the Northern Plains Indians," *Plains Anthropologist* 15 (1970): 99-103.

women in tow, the young husbands made a show of "thank[ing] them very humbly," and then immediately led their wives off to another partner. "The ceremony continues all night," Tabeau wrote, "the actors only changing partners at each scene." This was all repeated for as many nights as it took for the buffalo to come close enough—usually ten to fifteen days. During the particular ceremony that the Lewis and Clark expedition witnessed, however, the buffalo arrived after only three nights. The joyful Indians informed Tabeau that this was because the white men had participated in the ceremony, and that their especial spiritual power had attracted the buffalo like never before.[81]

Despite some participation by the white travelers—which the reader may assume was to the fullest extent—Tabeau's narrative suggests that most were revolted. The prostitution of one's beautiful wife to a naked, pawing, snorting old man—and the subsequent gratitude one had to express—must have seemed the ultimate degradation to men who viewed a wife's body as private property, her chastity a reflection of the power and masculinity of her husband. In Indian culture, however, a woman's body was more a *conduit* of power. Many believed that sex transferred a man's spiritual power and abilities to the woman, and that a subsequent sexual partner could therefore receive that power through the same woman. In the Mandan Buffalo Ceremony, then, the significant power of old men with years of warrior experience was transferred to the young warriors through their wives It was therefore requested with huge respect and received with extreme gratitude. Similarly, when Indian men offered their sisters, daughters, or wives for "mere trifles," or when an Indian woman freely offered herself to a white man, they often considered the act to *add* to the woman's value rather than decrease it. As anthropologist Edward Bruner writes, "if only because of their technological knowledge and material goods, the white traders must have appeared as very powerful individuals to the Indians."[82]

Whether or not white men understood Indians' incentives, they certainly could not fail to comprehend that the majority of Indian women were more sexually available than white women. Instead of decreasing a woman's value and inviting the wrath of her family—as with most white women—pre or extra-marital sex with Indian women often resulted in perceived power for the woman and her family. While sexual relations with a black slave or concubine were often advantageous in terms of ease and cost, relations with an Indian women could also provide protection, powerful allies, and economic benefits. It was for this reason that so many white men decided to actually marry Indian women. After all, they were desirable, available, cheap, eminently useful, multipliable…..and very easy to be rid of.

"Almost every [man] who commences in the business of this country speedily enters into such an arrangement . . . and just as unceremoniously do they annul and abolish this connexion."[83]

Marriage and Divorce

White travelers never failed to mention the fact that almost every Indian tribe practiced polygyny. Whether they denounced it, attempted to explain or understand it, or bluntly approved of it, these travelers always communicated their fascination with the practice. Most surprising for

[81] Abel, *Tabeau's Narrative,* 196-97.
[82] Edward Bruner quoted in Albers & Medicine, *The Hidden Half,* 45; For the cultural explanation of the Mandan Buffalo Ceremony, see Kehoe, "The Function of Ceremonial Sexual Intercourse," 99-103.
[83] Catlin, *Illustrations,* 120.

a historian, however, is how many men openly admired it, taking pains to detail its positive, sensible, and desirable aspects. Once white men got over their initial squeamishness at such an alien cultural norm, many came to see polygyny as an almost essential aspect of frontier existence—at least for a man of wealth and high social standing. And, of course, this is what most white men considered themselves.

The American fur trader Charles Larpenteur wrote in his popular travelogue that it was a "fine sight" to see "one of those big men among the Blackfeet, who has two or three lodges, five or six wives, twenty or thirty children, and fifty to a hundred horses. . . . I can assure you, such a man has a great deal of dignity about him." The artist George Catlin, who so admired the Indians that he considered himself a kind of curator of their cultural museum, professed that polygyny was the "natural inclination which belongs to a man." In the "state of nature," he wrote, where man is "surrounded by temptations which he considers it would be unnatural to resist," where "no law or regulation of society stands in the way of his enjoyment," and where it is "sanctioned by ancient custom and by their religion," it is not only "easily excusable" but "natural." Furthermore, he explained, it is sensible, since "such an accumulation of a man's household, instead of quadrupling his expenses (as would be the case in the civilized world), actually becomes his wealth." According to Catlin, then, only economic difficulty and social taboos kept "civilized" men from indulging in such traditions. The latter, however, Catlin seemed to think rather unnecessary, since he himself could find no difficulty arising from the situation. Indeed, he wrote, among many chiefs, braves, medicine men, and others "of great reputation" in the tribe, it was "common to see some six or eight [wives] living under one roof, and all apparently quiet and contented; seemingly harmonizing, and enjoying the modes of life and treatment that falls to their lot."[84]

In his popular memoir of his supposed years as an Indian captive, John Hunter agreed, explaining that Indian men knew how to carefully organize their wives to promote the greatest harmony. They built each wife her own lodge, and she "fulfill[ed] the respective duties of mother and wife separately." This latter description must have greatly appealed to a Victorian male readership accustomed to the vaunting of motherhood as a woman's highest calling, and to the social acceptability of the cessation of sexual relations with the arrival of babies. Of course, the fact that Hunter's memoir was known to be of questionable authenticity makes his insistence that Indian women were perfectly happy with polygyny rather dubious. He wrote that they "occasionally visit each other" in their respective lodges, and generally live on the most friendly terms." Indeed, they felt no jealousy at all that "the chief or warrior takes up his residence with the one he most esteems, and only leaves her, to reside with the next in favour, during the periods of her pregnancy and lactation." Instead of being bitter when a husband's fickle attentions returned, Hunter claimed that "the one with whom the husband resides, considers it her duty and interest, and is ambitious, to discharge all the offices pertaining to a wife, so far as regards his comfort and convenience."[85] Such a description was completely at odds with the numbers of travelogues that chronicled fist-fights, screaming matches, and even murders among jealous wives. It was also at odds with the findings of nineteenth and twentieth-century anthropologists, who found that discord among wives was a primary theme in tribal disputes, stories, and myths. However, the fact that many other well-traveled nineteenth-century authors

[84] Charles Larpenteur, *Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri,* ed. Elliot Cous (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1898), 2: 401; Catlin, *Illustrations,* 1: 119, 120.
[85] Hunter, *Manners and Customs of Several Indian Tribes,* 251.

maintained that Indian wives "live together in the greatest harmony," with "no jealousy or disunion" even though "their lord may love one more than another," suggests that white men projected their own desires onto Indian marriages, seeing only what they wished to believe.[86]

Unsurprisingly, these desires often translated into a white man's decision to marry his own Indian wife. Yet idealistic notions of Indian women's attractiveness, obedience, domestic virtues, and sexual allure were only part of their marital worth. Most importantly, white men knew that marriage to Indian women was practically essential for economic reasons: trappers and traders needed the advantages provided by Indian kin networks, settlers desired the land that passed down matrilineal lines in a number of tribes, and travelers of all sorts wanted Indian women's myriad wilderness skills to help them navigate and survive the frontier.

In the Cherokee lands of the South and Southwest prior to Indian Removal, the only way a foreigner could obtain land was to marry a Native woman. As historian Theda Perdue writes in her book on mixed-race Indians in the early South, "agricultural land and homesteads were vested in matrilineal and matrilocal households, so a man without a wife had no access to cleared fields and no right to establish a domicile." For this reason, almost all the Europeans who traded in Indian country took Native wives and became known as "Indian Countrymen." In fact, marriage to a Cherokee woman was so common that the Cherokee peoples began to suspect that it was opportunistic, and took pains to limit it. An 1819 law limited a white man to one wife, and specified that her property "shall not be subject to the disposal of her husband, contrary to her consent." An 1825 Creek law required a white man who divorced his Indian wife to "leave all his property with his children for their support." Despite these new legal regulations, the Removal Roll of 1835, which counted the members of Eastern tribes who were to be moved West, still listed over two hundred intermarried whites.[87]

Similarly, an Indian wife was practically essential to the livelihood of trappers and traders in the West. As soldier-author Colonel Richard Dodge explained in his 1882 work *Our Wild Indians,* trappers in the earlier decades of the century knew that they had to court tribes as well as wives. After arriving in the country they proposed to trap, each made his way to the village of Indians "most convenient to his territory," and then "proceeded to interview the chief whose friendship and protection were gained by numerous presents." To seal the deal, a short sojourn ended with the purchase of "one or more squaws and a tepee," which made him "a member of the tribe" and thus allowed him to go where he pleased and set his traps "as suited his pleasure." In his "squaw," moreover, he found a helpmeet who "made and mended his clothing, cooked his food, skinned the animals he caught, and properly cared for the pelts." When the fur-harvesting season was over he returned to her village, where he was certain to find buyers.[88]

Such an arrangement was so beneficial to all parties that, as historian Michael Lansing explains, "the fur companies unofficially embraced liaisons between their Euro-American employees and Native women" and "exploited intimate bonds to gain economic leverage in the trade." Lansing's examination of fur companies' records reveals that men of all classes purchased Indian wives. Women of lower status in their communities were given to engagés and other lower-class employees, while daughters of chiefs, great warriors, and other men of high

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[86] Cox, *The Columbia River*, 2: 290.
[87] Perdue, "'*Mixed-Blood' Indians,*" 15, 30, 31.
[88] Colonel Richard Irving Dodge, *Our Wild Indians: Thirty-Three Years' Personal Experience among the Red Men of the Great West* (Hartford, CT: A.D. Worthington and Company, 1882), 265-266.

standing married clerks and other middle-class men.[89] In his journal, Rudolph Friederich Kurz wrote that Edwin Denig, a bookkeeper at Fort Union, told him that "Men in charge of trading posts like to marry into prominent Indian families" because "by such a connection they increase their adherents, their patronage is expanded, and they make correspondingly larger profits." White men of the respectable classes also apparently preferred marrying mixed-race Indian women. Jacob Halsey, a clerk of the American Fur Company, married a Métis woman because "as the gentleman of rather a refined taste he selected a half-breed which is one step more toward civilization."[90] Such views reflect those on mixed-race black women, but marriage records nonetheless demonstrate that full-blooded Indian women were considered perfectly marriageable if their appearance was pleasant enough, their status high enough, and their kin networks advantageous enough.

Another major advantage of Indian marriages was that they were easy, cheap, informal, and sanctioned by neither church nor American law—in other words, easily dissolvable. Catlin noticed the nonchalant way traders and Indians entered into "connexions" which can "scarcely be called marriages" because they were "entered into without the form or solemnizing ceremony of a marriage," and "conducted purely as a mercenary or business transaction." For this reason, Catlin observed, traders were not at all squeamish about marrying women of an "inferior" race. "Almost every trader and every clerk who commences in the business of this country speedily enters into such an arrangement," Catlin explained, "which is done with as little ceremony as he would bargain for a horse, and just as unceremoniously do they annul and abolish this connexion when they wish to leave the country, or change their positions from one tribe to another." Furthermore, Catlin insisted, Indian society was completely accustomed to this kind of "divorce," and the women's reputation was not at all tarnished. An abandoned woman was simply seen as "a fair and proper candidate for matrimony or speculation, when another applicant comes along, and her father [is] equally desirous for another horse or gun, &c."[91]

Of course, marriage occasionally brought the burden of children, which in the civilized world tended to tie a man down even more securely. According to British traveler Ross Cox, however, "very few men wish to have any offspring by their Indian wives. A sterile woman is therefore invaluable."[92] Such a desire reflected white men's scientific beliefs about the sterility of mulatto women, feeding the fantasy of a sexually available woman who was not a threat to white racial purity. Nonetheless, Cox acknowledged, sterile Indian women were scarce. Intermarriages very often resulted in children, but this does not seem to have significantly affected most white men's conduct toward their Indian families. White men often found out about their new children only upon their seasonal return to their wife's tribe, and left them in her keeping when he left. As many Indian societies were matrilocal, interracial children were most often raised by their mothers and left with them on the occasion of their father's abandonment or divorce. Indian society, after all, was structured to accommodate children of divorced or otherwise absent parents; they were, most often, simply adopted into the familial unit of their mother's new husband.[93]

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[89] Lansing, "Plains Indian Women," 417, 423.
[90] "Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz," 156; Lansing, "Plains Indian Women," 424.
[91] Catlin, *Illustrations,* 1: 120.
[92] Cox, *The Columbia River,* 2: 362.
[93] Niethammer, *Daughters of the Earth,* 72—96; Perdue, "Native Women in the Early Republic," 101.

The fact that divorce was so common and easy in most Indian societies made intermarriage all the more attractive to white men. Just as the marriage itself was so informal that one clerk of the Northwest Company wrote in his journal that it simply involved "the bridegroom, at the time to retire to rest, show[ing] his bride where their common lodging place is," divorce could also be obtained by a simple, symbolic gesture of separation.[94] Kit Carson's second Indian wife, "Making-Out-Road," divorced Carson in the traditional Cheyenne fashion by throwing all of his possessions outside their tent. One trapper of the Northwest Company divorced his wife by simply fleeing his Indian family and offering his wife and child to another trapper who was willing to take his place.[95]

Authors often took time to explain Indian views on marriage and divorce. Many professed disgust that the Indians placed such little value on vows and intact families, and emphasized the most extreme cases. Tabeau of the Lewis and Clark expedition reported that Arikara marriages sometimes lasted only an hour, and the eighteenth-century historian John Lawson wrote that husbands and wives left each other "upon any frivolous excuse." A number of other authors, however, lauded the practices. Indeed, to a modern reader, some white travelers sound surprisingly liberal and progressive. In an American or European society where marriage was often a solemn, binding, and expensive contract, and where divorce was extremely difficult and socially unacceptable, Indian traditions must have seemed particularly freeing to men who already chafed at "civilized" societal restrictions. The eighteenth-century French explorer John Bossu wrote rather wistfully that the Illinois Indians "merely separate when they are no longer happy together, claiming that marriage is a matter of love and mutual assistance." The fur trader Alexander Longe thoughtfully recalled a Cherokee priest's simple, rational explanation that his people believed a married couple "had better be asunder than together if they do not love one another but live for strife and confusion."[96] Such thoughts must have appealed to men who saw too many examples of unhappy yet interminable marriages in white, Victorian society. The American trapper Daniel Williams Harmon, for example, wrote in his journal that the "one thing [that] is secured by this arrangement [of easy divorce]" is that "while persons live together, in a state of wedlock, they will live in harmony," something "by no means always found in the civilized world."[97] Harmon must truly have believed the "arrangement" to be superior to "civilized" marriage, for he eventually had a loving, monogamous, long-lasting marriage with an Indian woman.

John D. Hunter's memoir seems to have also catered to this perspective. It presented Indian marriage and divorce in the same, idealized way that it presented women's work and polygyny, appealing more to readers' fantasies than to fact. The Indians, he wrote, "enter into the marriage state for the mutual happiness and comfort of the parties concerned," and "no obligation exists for remaining in it for a longer period than these objects are secured." This was because the Indians believed that "whenever a continuance in this state becomes disagreeable to either one or both, the purposes of the original contract are defeated."[98] Despite Hunter's questionable authenticity, his explanation of Indians' perspectives on divorce has the ring of truth. Many Native American tribes, for example, married young men and women to older

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[94] Harmon, *A Journal of Voyages and Travels,* 58.
[95] Simmons, *Kit Carson and His Three Wives*, 41-42; O'Meara, *Daughters of the Country,* 202.
[96] Tabeau, Lawson, Bossu and Longe quoted in Perdue, "Native Women in the Early Republic," 101.
[97] Harmon, *A Journal of Voyages and Travels,* 58.
[98] Hunter, *Manners and Customs of Several Indian Tribes,* 252.

spouses so that the former could learn from their more experienced partners how to run households and provide for families. These young wives and husbands were often told that they would be able to choose their own spouses when they were older and had a better understanding of their own needs. Indian marriage was not a religious sacrament, but a contract between two families that could be dissolved if it did not prove emotionally, economically, or physically productive. Furthermore, tribal societies were structured around complex kin networks, so that men and women were spared the isolation of a nuclear family. Abandoned spouses could easily return to their families and remarry, and children could be raised by the community rather than any single set of parents.[99]

White men who married Indian women were often referred to as "squaw men" in white society. They could maintain their wives in the wilds of the West, but very few felt comfortable introducing them into their home culture. While travel literature very often highlighted the incentives and benefits of marriages between whites and Indians, American society in the East generally looked down on "squaw men." Historians have primarily focused on this ostracism, emphasizing the revulsion many felt at the perceived racial degradation that came from such "savage" connections. In general, American society was certainly loudly and publicly opposed to the actions of "squaw men" because they appeared to contradict the notion that white men were inherently more civilized than Indians, and to openly embrace the detested sin of amalgamation. Politicians, natural and social scientists, novelists, missionaries, Christian reformers, historians, Indian Service personnel and others argued against such interracial relations and condemned the men who engaged in them.[100]

Yet there were also many in American society who seemed intrigued—or at least titillated—by the "squaw men," as evidenced by the exceptional interest of the reading public in travel and fictional literature that described and romanticized them. Furthermore, one of the main reasons "squaw men" garnered such interest was because they posed a small but very real threat to white society. After all, they were not all men on the fringes of society. They included men of all classes who very often returned to white society for certain seasons, or who retired in style after successful years of trapping. These men brought their notions of marriage and divorce, gained after much time spent among various Indian tribes, to the very doorstep of white civilization. They were too few to pose a significant danger to Victorian culture at large, but their suggestive writings reached thousands of readers, and their attitudes and actions certainly affected the white women with whom they associated. Just as many southern wives had to contend with quadroon mistresses and "fancy" concubines who threatened their authority, many frontiersmen's wives had to compete with one or more Indian women who laid claim to their husbands. Sometimes, the allure and advantage of an Indian wife kept white men from fulfilling societal expectations by abandoning their Indian families in order to create white ones.

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[99] Niethammer, *Daughters of the Earth*, 72—78.

[100] For more on complicated and contradictory ideas on amalgamation and "squaw men," see David D. Smits, "'Squaw Men,' 'Half-Breeds,' and Amalgamators: Late Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Attitudes Toward Indian-White Race-Mixing," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 15, no. 3 (1991): 32.

"American women are valued at a low figure in the mountains. They are too fine and 'fofarrow."[101]

The Threat

Many frontiersmen often had multiple Indian wives. It was handy to have a number of different connections in a variety of places, because this meant that a fur trader could expand his trapping area, diversify his trading networks, and receive hospitality and protection from multiple tribes. It was also helpful to have more than one wife in one's own tent, since a man could take advantage of their combined labor—especially when more hands to skin pelts meant more wealth.[102]

And, certainly, polygyny gave men a personal kind of pleasure unheard of in white society—unless one counted the southern men who lived, as Mary Chesnut wrote, like "patriarchs of old."[103] The fantasy of polygyny affirmed a man's potent masculinity, his ability to protect and provide for multiple women, and his sexual stamina. It also gave him a power over his wives that men in white, American society lacked: if one wife displeased him, he could punish her by lavishing his attentions on the other. Ideally, then, a husband could manipulate the attentions and obedience of his wives so that he was perpetually indulged and perfectly cared for.

It was therefore unsurprising that many a white man added a white wife to his polygynous, interracial mix. Just as white society expected young Southern men to relinquish their slave paramours when they married white women, frontiersmen were supposed to abandon their Indian wives for the same purpose. But the "crisis of femininity" was as real out West as it was in the South, and frontiersmen found far too many selfish and practical reasons to simply add a white wife. A white wife, after all, added a social prestige that was necessary when a frontiersman moved in civilized circles. Indian wives, on the other hand, provided the necessary comforts and hard work required in the frontier life for which so many white women seemed woefully unprepared. Fur company records are quite blunt about these matters, especially since traders appear to have relished the gossip about their neighbors. The American Fur Company's employee, James Kipp, lived at Fort Clark with his Mandan wife and children and kept his white family at a safe distance in the states. Another A.F.C employee, Honoré Picotte, kept two Indian wives but went to St. Louis in 1831 to marry a French woman, whom he kept ignorant of his Indian family and cloistered in the States. Fur company employees even covered for each other when the possibility arose of a spousal clash. At Fort Pierre in 1848, one employee warned another that "Mrs. Picotte and Mrs. Kipp," the wives of the aforementioned James and Honoré, were planning a visit via steamboat. "I have no doubt that your Lady when she hears it will also wish to Come," the writer told the hapless husband, "so, would it not be well for you to dispense with the Society of at least some of your present Companions?"[104] One certainly wonders just

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[101] George Frederick Ruxton, *Life in the Far West* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1849), 132.

[102] Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 93.

[103] Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War,* 21.

[104] Kipp and Picotte's situations detailed in: "Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz," 240; John S. Gray, "The Story of Mrs. Picotte-Galpin, a Sioux Heroine: Eagle Woman Learns About White Ways and Racial Conflict," *Montana The Magazine of Western History 36* (Spring 1986): 5; F.A. Chardon, *Chardon's Journal at Fort Clark, 1834-1839,* ed.

how many white wives were duped in this way, and how many Indian wives were hurriedly bundled off for a family visit or hidden in an accomplice's lodgings.

Indian women, however, were not the unresisting, jealousy-free, perfectly biddable wives that some travelogues described. Many were unafraid to communicate their wishes or complaints to their white husbands, and found various ways to resist abandonment. For example, the head of the American Fur Company's post in Bellevue, Peter Sarpy, married an Omaha-Iowa girl named Nicomi, with whom he had eight children. He managed to convince her to move to St. Louis, where he built her a fine house and apparently attempted to introduce her into white society. Nicomi, however, was homesick, and begged to be taken back to her own lands, so Sarpy eventually built her a small home near his trading post while he kept a white wife across the river in St. Mary's, Iowa. It is possible that the two women knew about each other. After all, Indian women were accustomed to being one of many wives, and Sarpy apparently made a habit of unabashedly introducing Nicomi to friends and acquaintances as his Indian wife.[105]

Sarpy somehow managed to juggle both wives, but other men sometimes made the mistake of choosing one over the other. The Indian wife of a wealthy settler named Nye at Sutter's fort flew into a jealous rage over Nye's new white wife, insisting that the woman had "taken her place." In Indian culture, the first wife had a higher status than the second, and was often allowed to treat the latter like a servant. Nye's white wife, of course, would never have countenanced this, and Nye himself apparently balked at such an inversion of the racial hierarchy. He demanded that his Indian wife leave—which essentially amounted to divorce—but she took revenge by fleeing with his youngest child.[106]

Other Indian women simply refused to leave. John Yates, for example, had a peaceful marriage with two Indian women until the day he brought home a sixteen-year-old white wife. The Indians refused to leave, staying with him even when the girl's entire English family arrived. What made the whites especially livid was that Yates did not insist on his Indian wives' departure, but tried to wheedle a way to keep all three women. Such a culture clash was bound to end in ruin: the Indian women abandoned a husband who seemed unwilling to respect their status as first wives, and his white wife fled from a man who had been so permeated with Indian culture that he brazenly practiced polygyny.[107]

Reminiscing about his decades of fur trading in his memoir, *Our Wild Indians,* Colonel Dodge explained that interracial polygyny was quite common. When fur traders became wealthy (which, he wrote, happened "frequently," again negating the notion that these frontiersmen lived as poor social outcasts), they began collecting wives. Since their "red wives" were only "property" to be bought and sold at their leisure, neither requiring nor expecting special treatment, they were "no impediment to [the] possession of white wives and families in the States." Such a statement eerily reflects the fantasy of ownership of quadroon concubines and "fancy" slaves. Some of these men eventually "retire[d] from business," abandoned their Indian wives, "return[ed] to their families in the States and not infrequently t[ook] a prominent position in society and public affairs." Others, however, stayed in their western homes, "surrounded in a

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Annie Heloise Abel, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 63, 216. See also Lansing, "Plains Indian Women," 423.

[105] Mari Sandoz, *Love Song to the Plains* (New York: Harper, 1961), 74.

[106] Wilbur, *A Pioneer at Sutter's Fort,* 53—55, 62.

[107] Marguerite Eyer Wilbur, trans, *A Pioneer at Sutter's Fort, 1846—1850: The Adventures of Henrich Lienhard* (Los Angeles: The Califia Society, 1941), 53, 54, 62.

patriarchal manner by a crowd of admiring wives, children, and dependents."[108] These men could be even more open about their lives than the southern "patriarchs" Mary Chesnut described: far from the bindings of social mores or laws of regular states, they were free to live out their own, radical solution to the white sexual crisis.

The social embarrassment—and possible social threat—arose from the fact that a number of white men chose to remain western patriarchs rather than respectable eastern citizens. British writers tended to be blunter about frontiersmen's preference for Indian over white women; perhaps American writers were more fearful of a possible social backlash. In his travelogue *Life in the Far West*, published in 1849, the British explorer George Ruxton wrote that "American women are valued at a low figure in the mountains. They are too fine and 'fofarrow." They were, furthermore, appallingly useless, being unable to "make moccasins or dress skins," and they weren't "so schooled to perfect obedience to their lords and masters as to stand a 'lodge poleing,' which the western lords of creation not infrequently deem it their bounten duty to inflict upon their squaws for some dereliction of domestic duty." According to Ruxton, then, frontiersmen preferred their women useful, hard-working, slavishly obedient, and so meekly submissive that they accepted frequent beatings from husbands they treated as "lords."[109]

The British traveler Ross Cox echoed Ruxton's analysis in a story about a "flaxen-haired, blue-eyed daughter of Albion," Miss Barnes, who arrived at his fur camp to the consternation of all the trappers. "Everyone always stared at her," he wrote. "She flounced around in fancy and ridiculous clothes" and "was fond of quotations," attempting to seem cultivated and civilized but succeeding only in appearing ridiculous. Cox recalled a time when one of the clerks was defending the fort's Indian and Métis women, "whose characters [Miss Barnes] had violently attacked." The man told her "in no very measured language" that the conduct of white ladies he knew was far more deplorable, to which Miss Barnes retorted saucily "I suppose you agree with Shakespeare that 'every woman is at heart a rake?" The man corrected her misattribution, growling "Pope, m'am, if you please," to which Miss Barnes giggled "Pope! Pope! Bless me, sir! You must be wrong -- rake is certainly the word. — I never heard of but one female Pope." She then ended the argument by picking up a newspaper and proceeding to read it upside down. Disgusted, the clerk left the building and told the story to Cox. What offended him most, the clerk explained, was that Miss Barnes "look[ed] down with such contempt on our women," but was so clearly inferior on all levels.[110] To this clerk, it was the Indian women who deserved the possessive pronoun "our," not the white women of his own race, and it was the Indian women whose dress, demeanor, and attitude were far more demure and respectable.

Cox was intrigued by white frontiersmen's relations with Indian women, and clearly thought them far more deep, important, and abiding than they were often portrayed. Indeed, according to Cox, an Indian wife had a tendency to forever change white men, transforming their needs and desires. He acknowledged that, at the end of a successful career, a retired trader often separated from his Indian wife and returned to "civilized" society to "enjoy the pleasures of matrimony with an educated female." Indeed, Cox wrote, in Canadian society white women flocked to his side immediately upon his arrival, considering him adventurous, romantic, and likely quite rich. Some of these unions, Cox wrote, were happy, but there were many people, "particularly those who remain faithful to their Indian wives," who asserted "that many of their

[108] Dodge, *Our Wild Indians,* 261.
[109] Ruxton, *Life in the Far West,* 132.
[110] Ross Cox, *The Columbia River,* 2: 260-264

old associates have been sadly duped in their matrimonial speculations." He then provided quite a convincing explanation for the failure of such "civilized" marriages:

> The unfortunate husband too quickly discovers that a bright eye, a fair face, a sweet voice, or a tune on the piano is rather an empty compensation for the waste of a hard-earned fortune ; while, if he attempts to remonstrate against his wife's extravagance, his interesting bronze is compared to copper, the Oxford-grey assumes a whiter hue, the *air degage* degenerates to the air slovenly, and an English tongue [is] quite at variance with his ideas of conjugal submission[111]

According to Ross, an Indian wife was often found to encapsulate the virtues of the "cult of true womanhood" far more than a white woman. A cheap, hard-working, softly-spoken, doting, submissive and obedient Indian wife was likely to be preferred—despite her darker skin and lack of a "civilized" upbringing—to an expensive, carping white wife who, at least in comparison to her "slavish" Indian counterpart, seemed disobedient and vain.

"Squaw men," then, were not low-class, outcast men who coupled with Indian women only because they had no opportunities to find white women. They were not men who abandoned their Indian wives as soon as they took white partners, and they were not men who simply relinquished the ideas, practices, and desires they had imbibed from the West. Finally, they were not men on the fringes of society who made no cultural impact. Indeed, they posed a subtle—but very real—threat to Victorian civilization by earning themselves a very prominent, surprisingly romantic and heroic place in the American literary canon. They made the transition from man to myth to fiction, appearing first in travelogues, then becoming folk legends, then finding rebirth as characters in the frontier fiction that flooded the nineteenth-century literary market. Most often, it was their intimate knowledge of the "wild Indians" that made these "squaw men" so fascinating to the reading public. They were a strange combination of enigma, danger, and allure. To those who ascribed to Victorian culture, they were as unwashed and uncivilized as the savages with whom they chose to surround themselves, and their relations with Indian women were racially degrading. To those who ascribed to the culture of "aggressive masculinity," however, they embodied the ideals of a fighting spirit, derring-do, virility, and disgust for all that was "fo'farrow"—in other words, "fancy and pretentious."[112] Their sexual adventures with Indian women only enhanced their aura of powerful masculinity. Political figures were well aware of the allure frontiersmen held for many Americans, and a new type of young, usually western man specifically began to cultivate the image to vaunt himself to legendary status.

The hero of the Texas Revolution, Sam Houston, was particularly adept at portraying himself as a romantic "squaw man." In 1846, he had a highly romanticized, self-aggrandizing biography published about himself, titled *Sam Houston and his Republic.* The first section tells the story of his youth, when he ran away from home to live among the Indians. It was this

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[111] Ibid., 246-247.

[112] Indeed, many of the plays that were popular among the men who professed to ascribe to this culture of "aggressive masculinity," like the b'hoys mentioned in Chapter One, featured frontiersmen and "squaw men" as the main heroes. One famous example was Mose the Bowery B'hoy, a character whose origins were rooted in New York City's Bowery but who ventured west to seek his fortunes in the gold fields, meeting many beautiful Indian damsels on his way. See Tice Miller, *Entertaining the Nation: American Drama in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007). For more on the vaunted position of certain "squaw men"—as well as the reasons for their abrupt disempowerment—see West, *The Contested Plains*, 190.

experience, the author explains, that gave him "that wonderful training that fitted him for his strange destiny." It was among the "red men" that "a taste was formed for wild forest life" which made Houston abandon "the habitations of civilized men, with their coldness, their treachery, and their vices, and pass years among the children of the Great Spirit" until he was prepared to lead the founding of "a powerful Commonwealth": Texas. Blatantly attempting to elevate the man as myth, the author writes that "his wild history reminds us of the story of Romulus, who was nurtured by the beasts of the forest till he planted the foundation of a mighty empire." Such language was clearly aimed at those who ascribed to the anti-culture of "aggressive masculinity," shunning Victorian civilization as cold and treacherous. The author then provides the reader with a dreamy, utopian account of Houston's youth among the Indians, writing of the time he spent "running wild among the Indians, sleeping on the ground, chasing wild game, [and] making love to Indian maidens" Of all the life he saw since, Houston himself admitted, "there's nothing half so sweet to remember as this sojourn he made among the untutored children of the forest."[113]

But it was Houston's time with the Indian "maidens" that is singled out as the "moulding period of [his] life," since the liberty of their passions allowed him to cultivate his own, fiery spirit. His biography fancifully describes the time he spent "wandering along the banks of the streams by the side of some Indian maiden, sheltered by the deep woods, conversing in that universal language which finds its sure way to the heart." The author then suggestively adds that "in the absence of facts it would be no difficult matter to fancy what must have been his occupations." Indeed, what with all the travel literature published about Indian women at this time, an enthusiastic reader could quickly conjure a fantasy of Houston's amorous "occupations" among beautiful, sexually available, slavishly adoring Indian maidens. What is most interesting about this description, however, is that it portrays these love affairs not as the casual interactions of a lusty youth, but as important inspirations. Indian women, moreover, are presented not as promiscuous hussies nor even innocent, easily abandoned playthings, but as unique, inspirational muses. It was during Houston's time with them, the author writes, that "every idea of gratification fire[d] the blood and flashe[d] on the fancy—when the heart [wa]s vacant to every fresh form of delight, and ha[d] no rival engagements to withdraw it from the importunities of a new desire." The freedom of passion and the liberty of action that Indian women invited, the author claims, is what "the poets of Europe" so enthusiastically wrote about, "borrow[ing] their sweetest images from the wild idolatry of the Indian maiden."[114]

Yet it wasn't just European writers who found Indian maidens such perfect muses. Nineteenth-century American literature, too, began to idolize them. Obviously aware of the travel literature from which they borrowed much of their descriptions and stories, fiction authors were nonetheless very choosy about which stereotypes they incorporated. While the travel literature is most marked by its variety, lack of consensus, and contradictory notions, the fictional genre is extremely repetitive. The Indian "maiden" is almost always of the Pocahontas type: young, beautiful, noble, intelligent, selfless and loving. She strikingly mirrors the quadroons of "tragic mulatta" literature, endowed with similar looks, an alluring and available sexuality, admirable character traits, exceptional bravery, and absolute devotion to her white lover. Like the "tragic mulatta," too, the Indian women of romantic literature pose a threat to the white female characters. Most stories end in some kind of tragic doom for the Indian woman: either she, her white lover, or her entire race die. There are hardly any plots that allow for the

[113] Charles Edwards Lester, *Sam Houston and His Republic* (New York: Burgess, Stringer, & Co., 1846), 13.
[114] Ibid., 13.

simultaneous happiness of Indian and white women: the marriage of one usually means the disappearance or even death of the other. The romance of the plot therefore revolves around the heart-wrenching choices that must be made: Indian women must choose between loyalty to their own people or to the whites, and between white "civilization" or Indian "savagery," and white men must choose between Indian or white women.

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"The Prettiest Wild Thing I Ever Saw"[1]
Indian Maidens in Antebellum Literature

Almost all antebellum fictional literature about Indian women featured Pocahontas. She may not have been *called* Pocahontas, and her plotline may have varied in different ways, but almost every single female Indian character in American or European works was based on the idealized version of Pocahontas that became so popular in poetry, fiction, drama and art. In the newly imagined Pocahontas legend, the Indian princess is a gorgeous young teenager who falls in love with the manly, rugged adventurer John Smith, only to suffer heartbreak when he returns to England. Her affections are then rekindled by the ardent love of another colonist, John Rolfe, whom she ends up marrying and to whom she bears a son. In his analysis of the Smith-Pocahontas story in literature, scholar Jay Hubbell writes that "In the nineteenth century the poets and writers of fiction were—from the historian's point of view—unduly fascinated by the story of Pocahontas' rescue of Smith from death at the hands of Powhatan's executioner."[2]

The first writer of any importance to chronicle the legend (which at that time remained relatively obscure) was the English traveler and novelist John Davis. His work *The Farmer of New Jersey*, published in 1800, began the "cottage industry" on Pocahontas. The legend became so popular that Davis re-wrote it in countless short-stories, novels, and poems, and hundreds of other writers copied him.[3] Like the "tragic mulatta," the character I label the "Pocahontas figure" appeared in almost every art form and was handled by male and female, American and European writers of all regions, political persuasions, and levels of talent and fame. By 1846, the American editor James Rees was commenting that plays on Indians had become "a perfect nuisance," and Pocahontas had become one of America's most famous female legends.[4] While the majority of writers surveyed in this chapter were men, the readership seems to have been quite varied. The prevalence of Indian romances in men's magazines, women's journals, college pamphlets, and family serials, in books and periodicals from all regions, and from poets and authors of the respected literati to dime novel scribblers, suggests that their popularity was not limited to any single demographic.

Historian Robert Tilton holds that the roots of this "undue fascination" lay "in the Anglo-American interpretations of the actions of indigenous American women," which "point to the popularity of a particular white male fantasy"—that of the irresistibility of white civilization and white men. Pocahontas's betrayal of her own people in order to save her beloved white

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[1] The title of this chapter is derived from a quote in John Beauchamp Jones' *Wild Western Scenes,* when one of the white male characters appreciatively calls La-u-na, the story's Indian heroine, "the prettiest wild thing I ever saw." John Beauchamp Jones, *Wild Western Scenes: A Narrative of Adventures in the Western Wilderness* (1849; repr., Philadelphia: Grigg, Elliot And Co, 1858), 231.

[2] Hubbell, "The Smith-Pocahontas Story in Literature," 277.

[3] For information on Davis, as well as a timeline showing all works on Pocahontas and, specifically, those inspired by Davis, see: Edward J. Gallagher, "Pocahontas Timeline," The Pocahontas Archive, History on Trial, in the Lehigh Digital Library, http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/trial/pocahontas/time.php.

[4] Hubbell, "The Smith-Pocahontas Story in Literature," 286.

friends seemed to legitimate imperialism and "manifest destiny" in the white mind.[5] This interpretation suits the stories that adhered to the traditional Pocahontas plotline, but fictional literature quickly began to veer off course. "Pocahontas figures" were introduced who refused to betray their people, who struggled with white women for white men's affections, who died along with their white lovers, or who forever ruined the happiness of their white, female rivals or friends. Such a spectrum of stories suggests that the popularity of the "Pocahontas figure" in fiction was due to its indulgence of a host of white male fantasies besides that of racial domination: the fantasy of non-white hyper-sexuality, the fantasy of ownership, and the fantasy of polygyny.

Like the "tragic mulatta" literature, the works involving "Pocahontas figures" tended to follow specific formulas. The Indian woman is invariably beautiful, with exceptionally light skin and Europeanized features that are attributed either to her regal lineage—for she is almost always a princess—or to her half-white blood. She is also exceptionally young, barely flowering into womanhood, and therefore has a childlike simplicity and naiveté that are at once charming and titillating. Her perfect innocence, for example, allows her to wear scanty clothing and engage in naively sexual displays. In John Davis's popular story *Captain Smith and Princess Pocahontas,* for example, Pocahontas entertains Smith and other male colonists with a dance that involved "thirty girls . . . with no other covering than a girdle of green leaves, and their skins painted."[6] In the childlike innocence and the exceptional athleticism attributed to her being a "daughter of the forest," the "Pocahontas figure" differs slightly from the more mature, melancholy "tragic mulatta" character. Her allure lies primarily in her physical freedom and wildness, which are depicted as sexually enticing. Thus her scanty clothing, loose hair, ornaments of flowers and shells, and ability to melt in and out of nature like a wood nymph are often described as attributes of a spiritual or supernatural being. Like the nymphs and goddesses of ancient myth, she is far more passionate and freely sexual than mortal, white women. She invariably falls deeply, desperately in love with a white man and, like the Pocahontas of myth, often displays an inspiring bravery and a willingness to sacrifice her own life for him.

Many stories veered off the traditional Pocahontas track by introducing jealous Indian lovers, white female rivals, and hostile, prejudiced white families. In every single story, the white male is deeply attracted to the Indian woman, and openly admires her for being the equal or the superior to white, "civilized" women. Yet, to antebellum audiences, the stories remained "safe" in their depiction of interracial romance for a variety of reasons. Firstly, almost all take place in an imagined past, some reaching back to Columbus's voyages and others to Jamestown, the Seven Years War, or the Revolution. They were therefore considered safe because nineteenth-century American society, with its laws and racial hierarchies, was not yet supposed to have been fully formed. Furthermore, they were safe because, unlike the "tragic mulatta" literature, they almost never ended happily. The theme that spans almost every nineteenth-century fictional representation of Indian women is extermination, either of the Indian woman, the white man, the Indian woman's "savage" ways when she enters white civilization, or the Indian woman's people as the white race destroys their way of life. White women are not nearly as prevalent in these works as in the "tragic mulatta" literature—indeed, they are sometimes entirely absent, or are rather shadowy, peripheral characters. When they are present, however, they rarely die, but almost always cause the doom of the Indian woman. To antebellum readers,

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[5] Tilton, *Pocahontas,* 85

[6] John Davis, *Captain Smith and Princess Pocahontas: an Indian Tale* (Philadelphia: Thomas Plowman, 1805), 79.

their existence was a reminder that white "civilization" could not exist simultaneously with Indian "savagery."

Just as beautiful quadroons made slavery appear horrible in "tragic mulatta" literature, so lovely Indian princesses made extermination seem tragic in nineteenth-century Indian romances. The threat of the latter, then, lay not in the literature's portrayal of happy endings of interracial marriage, though these did occasionally occur. Partly, it lay in the romanticization of a race that, in reality, was *not* exterminated but constantly coming into contact with increasing numbers of white migrants. And it also lay in the thinly veiled suggestions about the possibility of polygyny. In almost every story in which the white-Indian romance is doomed, the acceptance of a polygynous marriage between a white man and two wives, one white and one Indian—and its acceptance by white society—would have saved everyone. Such a message may have seemed safe had the Indians truly been as "vanished" as many Americans on the East Coast perceived them to be by the mid nineteenth century. The fact that they were very much alive, powerful, and numerous in the West—and that travel literature was constantly reminding white America of interracial polygyny—made the fantasy a distinct danger with the potential to exacerbate the "crisis of femininity."

"Her features were of regular beauty, her expression contained . . . [a] blend of passion and virtue, whose appeal was irresistible. . . . [H]er looks breathed extremes of sensibility."[7]

The Indian Heroine

The descriptions of Indian women in antebellum fiction were very obviously based on the period's travel literature—but selectively so. Only the most flattering descriptions were used, though fictional writers appear to have been more squeamish about praising those of pure Indian lineage. In stories set in more recent times, writers most often granted their Indian heroines a white mother or father. This acknowledged the existence of interracial liaisons, but it also allowed authors to describe the heroines in similar ways to "tragic mulattas," emphasizing their rich, warm, soft coloring, often using fruit and flower metaphors. These maidens have "a delicious redness" in their "cherub lips," "peach-bloom colors" in their "rich complexion[s]," or "soft brown velvety skin" and "lips like a rosebud picked the day before yesterday."[8] Women like Pocahontas, whom no writer could pretend possessed a drop of white blood, nonetheless have "white" qualities like "fine dark eyes [that] beamed forth that moral sense," and an exceptional "grace and courtesy."[9] In the most popular Pocahontas play of the nineteenth century, George Washington Custis' *The Settlers of Virginia,* Pocahontas's lover and soon-to-be-husband John Rolfe muses that "tho' of dark complexion, she is well favour'd both in form and feature, of admir'd carriage, courteous and discreet in discourse." In James Fenimore Cooper's *Mercedes of Castille,* the lovely, pure-blooded Queen of the Haitians whom Columbus' crew

[7] François-René de Chateaubriand, *Atala and René* (1801; repr., London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 10.
[8] Davis, *Captain Smith and Princess Pocahontas,* 45; S.H.M, "A Legend of Cherokee," *The Georgia University Magazine,* October 1854, 264; George Payne Rainsford James, *Ticonderoga: or, The Black Eagle* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1854), 14; Chateaubriand, *Atala,* 55.
[9] Davis, *Captain Smith and Princess Pocahontas,* 45-46; George Washington Custis, *Pocahontas, or, The Settlers of Virginia: a National Drama in Three Acts* (1830; repr., Alexandria, VA : Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company, 2000), 15.

encounters has a "color [that] was not unpleasant," since her people "were said to be very little darker than the people of Spain. [Some] might . . . have even been termed fair."[10]

Just as in the travelogues, authors were quick to point out that Indian women's complexions were often no darker than those of Mediterranean countrywomen—a description that gave them claim to white Europeanism. In John Beauchamp Jones' runaway bestseller, *Wild Western Scenes,* the half-white Indian princess La-u-na is provided with a figurative pedigree that spans southern Europe, with a complexion "but a shade darker than the maidens of Spain," "long silken lashes" that "would have been envied by an Italian beauty," and "features as regular as those of a Venus," with a face that was "strictly Grecian."[11]

Indian women's hair, lips, teeth and eyes were often described in markedly similar ways to the quadroons of nineteenth-century literature, casting them as comparably ripe, voluptuous, sexual creatures. They, too, have lips "like cherries" with teeth like "rows of ivory" or "of the whiteness and lustre of pearls," and eyes like "brilliant ornaments of jet" that were "large and soft" but which "glanc[ed] a latent fire that showed her race." Like quadroon women, Indian women's eyes were seen to be the "windows of the soul"—and the soul, for these women, was racialized, burning with "latent fires" of passion.[12] As in the travel literature, significant attention was also given to their long, black hair. Indian women's hair was supposed to be a symbol of their wildness and freedom, reflecting the spirit these women were supposed to posses. The hair of the Haitian Queen Ozema in Cooper's *Mercedes* is "silken, soft, waving, exuberant, and black as jet," a "glorious mantle." Pocahontas's hair in Davis's famous legend "emulated in colour the glossy plumage of the eagle," flowing "in luxuriant tresses down her comely back and neck," and spreading sensuously over "the polish and symmetry, the rise and fall, of a bosom just beginning to fill." Interestingly, as Davis's Pocahontas falls more deeply in love with Smith, her hair becomes more sexual: she begins weaving "the gayest flowers of spring" into the "streaming tresses" that "riot down her comely neck and shoulders, shading, but not hiding the protuberance of her bosom."[13]

Indian women's bodies were also described as intensely sexual, with a freedom, grace, and luxuriousness that mirrored their flowing hair. This was partly ascribed to their race, since many fiction writers copied travel literature's claims that the Indian people possessed a kind of inherent elegance. Such a notion was so deeply entrenched in readers' fantasies that authors mentioned it in an almost offhand way. In *Mercedes,* Cooper writes that that the "aborigines of the West Indies were "singularly well formed, and of a natural grace in their movements," and William Caruther describes the Indian heroine of his best-seller *The Cavaliers of Virginia* as "exquisitely proportioned, and graceful," just "like most of the aboriginal females." Such a stereotype seems to have been so entrenched that it is a white, *female* character in George Paine Rainsford's *Ticonderoga* who states "I do think that what my father would call the finest species of the human animal are to be found among the Indians."[14]

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[10] Custis, *Pocahontas,* 16; James Fenimore Cooper, *Mercedes of Castile: or, the Voyage to Cathay* (1840; repr., New York: W.A Townsend and Company, 1861), 384.
[11] Jones, *Wild Western Scenes,* 230.
[12] Cooper, *Mercedes,* 392; Caroline F. Orne, "Northington: A Tale of the Seventeenth Century," *The Ladies' Companion* (New York: October 1839), 272; E.F. Ellet, "Jocassee Valley*,"* in *The Dew Drop: A Tribute of Affection,* William Henry Benade, ed. (Philadelphia: Lippincotte, Crambo & Co, 1852), 293.
[13] Cooper, *Mercedes, 392;* Davis, *Captain Smith and Princess Pocahontas,* 45, 46, 48.
[14] Cooper, Mercedes, 384; William Alexander Caruthers, *The Cavaliers of Virginia; or, the Recluse of Jamestown. An Historical Romance of the Old Dominion*. (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1835), 1: 69;

Of course, the beauty of Indian women's bodies was also attributed to the scantiness of their clothing, and to their total lack of bindings like corsets and hoop skirts. Cooper's magnificent Queen Ozema "possessed just those advantages that freedom from restraint, native graces, and wild luxuriance, might be supposed to lend the female form." Many writers allowed their readers titillating views of Indian women's bodies by intently describing the way their plump, rounded limbs moved under their thin robes, or by calling attention to lovely, exposed brown limbs and bosoms. Cooper's *Mercedes of Castile* provides one of the most blatantly sexual descriptions of an Indian woman's clothing, softening it with assurances of her charming naiveté. When one of Columbus's companions, Luis de Bobadilla, presents the Haitian Queen Ozema with a beautiful turban, she immediately strips naked "without a thought of shame," and before his eyes "folded her faultless form in the cloth." This, Cooper insists, was "done with a grace and freedom peculiar to her unfettered mind," since "all was so frank and natural with this artless girl;" Ozema has "a naiveté so irrepressible," and "ingenuousness so clearly the fruit of innocence," that her sexual acts appear pure and even endearing. Nonetheless, the possibility that such "artlessness" could quickly translate into a trusting acceptance of more forward propositions is revealed when Ozema then gives Luis a necklace in return for his gift. Her face is "half-averted," but Luis glimpses her "laughing and willing eyes."[15] It therefore seems that the gift exchange has left Ozema "willing" and perhaps even expectant of an ensuing sexual exchange; after all, such customs were widely described in the travel literature.

Yet while travel literature could describe Indian women as both beautiful and lascivious, alluring and promiscuous, fictional literature had to ensure that its Indian heroines conformed to certain standards of romantic femininity. After all, authors needed to ensure that their readers *recognized* the Indian maidens as protagonists and heroines; a certain, predictable formula was needed to align the reader's interest with those of the Indian women. They could therefore be portrayed as sexual but not licentious. Their non-white blood was supposed to endow them with a particularly exotic allure, and their "unfettered minds," freed from societal restraints, made them more like willing, trusting children than promiscuous prostitutes.

This unbounded spirit was also reflected in the heroines' personalities. In many ways, their characteristics mirrored those of the "tragic mulattas," evidencing the nineteenth-century belief in the basic homogeneity of non-white peoples, and the notion that skin color directly translated into character and morality. Indian heroines are noble (either because of their white or royal blood), fiercely brave, deeply passionate, and inherently—though often unwittingly—sexual. Furthermore, just as the "tragic mulatta" was supposed to be as marvelous a domestic worker as her traditional, slave status implies, so Indian heroines were supposed to be hugely contented with the drudgery associated with their tribal societies. Yet while the "tragic mulatta" figure was still bound by rigid societal rules, part of the allure of the Indian woman's character was her total ignorance of civilizational strictures and notions of propriety. It was this refreshing innocence, this titillating naiveté, which was especially enticing to men who may have been chafing at the confines of Victorian sensibilities.

James Fenimore Cooper voices this attraction in *Mercedes of Castille.* When the Spanish nobleman-turned-adventurer Luis de Bobadilla brings home the gorgeous Queen Ozema to show off to the Spanish court, everyone assumes that she has replaced Mercedes, the belle of Castile, in his affections. A bewildered Queen Isabella asks whether the Indian princess is "really of

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James, *Ticonderoga,* 32.

[15] Cooper, *Mercedes,* 384, 390-393.

sufficient beauty to supplant a creature as lovely as the Dona Mercedes?" But her friend Beatriz wisely tells her "it is not that.

> Men are fickle—and they so love novelties! Then is the modest restraint of cultivated manners less winning to them, than the freedom of those who deem even clothes superfluous. . . . [T]he ill-regulated fancy of a thoughtless boy may find a momentary attraction in her unfettered conduct and half-attired person, that is wanting to the air and manners of a high-born Spanish damsel, who hath been taught rigidly to respect herself and her sex.[16]

Such an explanation would be somewhat soothing if one could believe men's fancies were "ill-regulated," "thoughtless," and "momentary," but what of deep-seated, long-lasting attachments to Indian women whose virtues surpassed the temporary allure of "unfettered conduct" and "half-attire" to make them the true rivals of white, civilized women? What of a woman like Pocahontas, whom Custis's John Rolfe proclaims is so "full of grace and courtesy" that if "such be the damsels of the savage court, we shall need all the advantages of our civilization when we appear before them." Almost all the Indian heroines of nineteenth-century romantic literature possess noble, admirable qualities coveted by even the highest born, white female characters. Princess Tallu in the short story "A Legend of the Cherokee" is notable for "the native majesty of her eyes and brow, which beamed forth like genius." The Blackfoot princess in another popular vignette, "The Death Blanket," presents "the air and mien of a princess—so firmly, majestically and bravely did she walk . . . a model of beauty and female modesty." Such women are truly a race apart from the "squaws" so degraded by white society. In John Beauchamp Jones' bestseller, *Wild Western Scenes,* the white woman Mary cries out to her friend Joe "Oh don't call *her* a squaw, Joe." After all, the Indian maiden La-u-na is "more like an angel than a squaw." Joe agrees, promising "I won't do so again, because she's the prettiest wild thing I ever saw." Mary's brother, William, certainly thinks so, for he falls desperately in love with La-u-na, begging his white family to accept her into their home because "she is as innocent as the lily by the brook, and as noble as a queen."[17]

Lest their readers balk at such high compliments, authors were very often careful to emphasize the fact that their Indian heroines were exceptionally *unlike* their own people. Wyanokee, the Indian heroine of Caruthers' *Cavaliers of Virginia,* is so superior that her people make her their queen. She, however, is "disgusted with [their] moral blindness," and finds excuses to leave their revels to dwell in her tent with Nathaniel Bacon, the white man she loves. "There was," Caruther writes, "a melancholy pleasure in holding communion with one so far superior to the rude, untutored beings she had just left." Such women seem far more suited to the company of whites than Indians, a reason many white male characters cite when they ask the heroines to abandon their own people and live in white society. Otaitsa, the lovely Indian heroine of *Ticonderoga* who ends up marrying into a white frontier family, is excused for doing so because, as her white father-in-law says, "I never can bring myself to feel that she is an Indian." After all, her voice is so "melodious," her movements full of such a "grace and dignity," and she is so adaptable "to every European custom," that her father-in-law admits he often forgets "that

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[16] Ibid., 476.

[17] Custis, *The Settlers of Virginia,* 15; S.H.M, "A Legend of Cherokee," 267; Percy Bolingbroke St. John, "The Death Blanket," in *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*, January 6, 1844, 373; Jones, *Wild Western Scenes*, 237.

she is not some very high bred lady of the court of France or England."[18] In other words, then, the ideal Indian heroine (for antebellum readers, at least) was as virtuous as she was beautiful, a magical being of "white" qualities trapped in a "savage"—but nonetheless desirable—body.

Indian heroines were not intended to seem *too* much like the high bred ladies of the European court, however—that would remove their allure. To present them as romantic yet *exotic* heroines, authors needed to play upon the kinds of fantasies engendered by the travel literature. Indian heroines were therefore endowed with a few, inherent elements of their "savage," non-white nature: a willingness for drudgery, a remarkable bravery essential to frontier life, a passionate nature, and a deep, desperate love for white men. In Custis's famous Pocahontas play, the Indian princess herself equates marriage with joyful enslavement. After saving Smith from her father's deadly tomahawk, the grateful colonist places his golden necklace around her neck. His companions, however, tell him to "bind two in his golden shackle" by roping John Rolfe into the chain as well, since it is clear he and Pocahontas are in love. Embracing the symbolic gesture, Pocahontas announces that "she will most cheerfully submit to wear the chain which binds her to the honour'd master of her fate, even tho' the chain were of iron instead of gold."[19] Though such words appear romantic, they take on a slightly more sinister bent when one recalls white society's beliefs about Indian marriage, and the stereotype of the Indian slave-wife.

Of course, such bondage could still be viewed as romantic as long as the woman was enthusiastically willing. And, just as so many travelogues had insisted that Indian women took extensive pride and pleasure in their drudgery, so fiction presented it as the greatest desire and ambition of many Indian heroines. In the French author François-René de Chateaubriand's *Atala,* which became one of the most popular stories of the nineteenth century in both Europe and America, the title character, an Indian princess, yearns for domestic enslavement. She tells her warrior lover, Chactas, that her "height of happiness" would be "to spend my life at your feet, to serve you like a slave, to prepare your meals and make your bed in some obscure corner of the world."[20] The fact that nineteenth-century readers considered Atala and Chactas's love—though tragically doomed—the epitome of romance indicates the extent of the fantasy of ownership in both America and Europe.

By 1845, the stereotype of the Indian "drudge" in fictional literature had, in many stories, been transformed into something more aptly termed the "domestic goddess." Female Indian characters were stereotyped as having a nature suited to dutiful servitude. In "The Trapper's Bride," the popular British dime novelist Percy Bolingbroke St. John introduces his short story with his own, personal commentary. "The submissive and resigned nature of the Indian female character," he declares, "combined with their industry and power of enduring labor and fatigue," made their marriages with white trappers "common in the extreme," and "generally happy." Clearly gleaning his claims from well-known travelogues, he insists that Indian women made "obedient wives, to whom their [husband's] word is law, and who, without a murmur, take upon themselves all the duties of the household, and even more than the duties." Bolingbroke's own heroine, the Eutaw princess Moama, is accordingly depicted in a scene of domestic bliss,

[18] Caruthers, *The Cavaliers of Virginia,* 2: 35; James, *Ticonderoga,* 32.
[19] Custis, *The Settlers of Virginia,* 45.
[20] Chateaubriand, *Atala* , 43—44.

relentlessly cooking, cleaning, and caring for the children while her white husband smokes his pipe in beatific idleness."[21]

Yet these same domestic goddesses could also exhibit great passion and liberated sexuality. While domesticity and motherhood tended to be equated with asexuality in white, Victorian society's concept of the "cult of true womanhood," Indian women supposedly managed to be both dutifully domestic and powerfully passionate. After all, as John Hunter had claimed in his supposed memoir, Indian women knew how to "fulfill the respective duties of mother and wife separately."[22] In fictional literature, too, they admirably balanced the two roles, their passionate natures attributed to both their free, natural lifestyles and their fiery, non-white blood. Like "tragic mulattas," Indian heroines' emotions were often described in terms of heat, an irresistible, consuming flame that was nonetheless tempered by a safe amount of natural virtue.

Pocahontas herself was the symbol of Indian women's passion. Her own, powerful devotion to several white men drove her to first sacrifice herself for the life of John Smith and then to sacrifice her ties to her own people by marrying John Rolfe, eventually sailing to Europe with him. In *Captain Smith and Princess Pocahontas*, Davis presents both choices as the result of "the flame of love" which "lighted up in [her] bosom." When on her way to London with Rolfe, Davis writes that "her feelings were raised to an elevation which the inhabitants of the pale climates of the North can but imperfectly conceive."[23] Many in the nineteenth century associated races with climates and climates with emotions: whites, the pale inhabitants of the colder regions of Northern Europe, were thought to have more frigid, cool temperaments than the darker races of the hot, sultry South. Emotions as intense as those of Pocahontas were therefore supposed to be incomprehensible—but certainly quite captivating—to whites.

Other "Pocahontas figures" were described in very similar ways. Otaitsa, the heroine of *Ticonderoga*, is described fondly—if slightly condescendingly—by her white friend Edith as "a dear creature, all soul, and heart, and feeling." Queen Ozema's passion for Luis in *Mercedes* is also described as a product of race and climate; again, a white female character is chosen to describe the Indian woman's fevered emotions. "The feeling of the Indian is not merely admiration," Countess Beatriz explains to Queen Isabella, but "a passionate devotion, as partaketh of the warmth of that sun, which, we are told, glows with a heat so genial in her native clime."[24] Such descriptions echo the travel literature's assurance that Indian women were completely unreserved in communicating their feelings, and enthusiastically willing to act upon them—a characteristic that was certainly advantageous for amorous white men. For this reason, Pocahontas throws her own body over that of John Smith to save his life—Queen Ozema readily agrees to venture back to Spain with Luis—Otaitsa arranges the rescue of her white lover, Walter, from her own tribe—and Moama, the Indian heroine of *The Trapper's Bride*, leaves her people in the midst of a ceremony as soon as her white lover whistles for her, throwing herself into his arms and consenting to elope with him.

Many writers took advantage of the stereotypes of Indian women's unrestrained passions and inherently sexual natures to provide explicit sex scenes that would have been far more

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[21] Percy Bolingbroke St. John, *The Trapper's Bride: a Tale of the Rocky Mountains* (London: Hayward and Adam, 1845), 3.
[22] Hunter, *Manners and Customs,* 251.
[23] Davis, *Captain Smith and Princess Pocahontas,* 48, 104.
[24] James, *Ticonderoga,* 32; Cooper, *Mercedes,* 479.

scandalous had they involved white women. In Davis's Pocahontas story, Rolfe first meets the Indian princess when she is laying flowers on the grave she has been told belongs to John Smith. Aroused by the state of her undress as well as by the emotional intensity of her grief, Rolfe catches her in his arms when she swoons in shock from his sudden arrival. He "encircle[es] with his arm her unrobed, but pure form," and her bosom heaves under her "ebon tresses" that only partially "concea[l] its dazzling beauties." Though she "turn[s] aside in disorder"—after all, this scene looks suspiciously like rape—the reader is assured of her willingness when Davis writes that "a languishing look, half concealed under the shadow of her long eye-lashes, discovered what her lips withheld." Clearly, the reader is supposed to infer that such a scene could not be rape if the Indian woman so clearly desired it. Davis writes that "Pocahontas turned to chide, but it was with heaving sighs . . . . She leant towards him with emotions that discovered tenderness rather than anger." The reader can only suppose that she quickly succumbed to Rolfe's seduction, because the next paragraph abruptly starts with an announcement that "the day was now breaking." The supposition that the two slept together is confirmed by the author's statement that "Pocahontas urged to go; but Rolfe could scarce relinquish the bliss of rioting in the draught of intoxication, as he held her in his arms."[25]

Such metaphors connoting conflagration and intoxication sound suspiciously similar to the famous sex scene in Chateaubriand's literary phenomenon *Atala,* published four years earlier. While in the woods, Atala is accosted by her lover, Chactas, in a way that mirrors Pocahontas's forceful seduction in Davis's work. Maddened by his desire for Atala, Chactas finally ensures that her "struggles would be unavailing" by forcing himself upon her. "In vain did I feel her put her hand to her bosom, with a strange movement; already had I laid hold on her, already was I intoxicated with her breath, already had I drunk all the magic of love on her lips." Like Davis's Pocahontas, however, Atala secretly desires the seduction, opening herself to Chactas and "offer[ing] now but little resistance."[26] According to Davis and Chateaubriand, then, it wasn't really possible to rape Indian women; their inherently sensual natures eventually gave in to forceful manliness. In this way, sexism and racism combined to imbue Indian women with a similar sexual nature to that of the black Jezebel—though, at least in the literature, Indian maidens were somewhat more innocent and submissive.

Indian women's passionate natures were therefore assumed to ensure both easy sex and admirable devotion to their lovers. Yet such natures were sometimes also portrayed as tragic flaws. While passion was invariably described as a positive trait by both authors and other characters, the theme of many stories was that such intensity was unsuited for civilized, restrained society. Many Indian heroines therefore suffer a kind of emotional tug-of-war between their inherent ardor and the womanly reserve expected in white society. Wyanokee, the magnificent Indian queen who becomes a servant in white Virginia, struggles with her feelings for Nathaniel Bacon. Before her time with whites, "the customs of her race would have fully borne her out in declaring her passion to its object at once." But since her young, white mistress had "impressed upon her mind the necessity of reserve and modesty in her intercourse with the other sex," Wyanokee has become adept at "concealing the passion that possessed her heart." When she sees Bacon, her eyes alight with "a momentary flash of some internal impulse," but it

[25] Davis, *Captain Smith and Princess Pocahontas,* 93—95.
[26] Chateaubriand, *Atala,* 30.

only "glimmer[s] with a demoniacal fire for an instant, and then, like the expiring taper in the socket after its last flash, [is] sunk for ever."[27]

The dissipation of Wyanokee's emotions is followed by her own disappearance: she chooses to leave white society in order to become the queen of her tribe, but their defeat at the hands of white settlers dooms her and her people to exile. Other stories were even more explicitly fatal for the Indian maidens. When James Fenimore Cooper's Ozema arrives in Spain only to find that her beloved Luis is actually betrothed to the aristocratic Mercedes, she has such a massive emotional breakdown in front of Queen Isabella that the memory of it "haunted" the latter's "troubled slumbers" for a long while after. Interestingly, the draining away of her emotions whitens the Indian queen: after Ozema's heart breaks, her "color . . . was gone, leaving a deadly paleness in its place."[28] In the end, she cannot live with such a broken, drained body and soul, and dies just before Luis and Mercedes' marriage.

In *Atala,* the intense struggle between the sexual restraint of white civilization and the supposed liberties of Indian society are contained within the title character's own body. Atala has both white and Indian blood, and the entire story revolves around the tragic battle between her passion for Chactas—attributed to her Indian blood—and her commitment to her own virginity—attributed to her white, Catholic blood. In the end, the internal conflict actually kills her, turning her cold and—like Ozema—white. "Weariness, anguish, poison, and a passion more deadly than all poisons together, combined to ravish this flower of solitude," Chateaubriand writes, hinting that white and Indian blood were fundamentally opposed and therefore incapable of co-existence. "A general numbness seized upon Atala's limbs, and the extremities of her body began to turn cold . . . . In her cheeks of dazzling white, blue veins showed."[29]

In many stories, then, the powerful allure of Indian women was tempered by the moral that Indian passions, customs, and societies were rapidly crumbling in the wake of white civilization's advance. Whether the struggle between white and Indian blood took place within a particular character's soul, between two women vying for a white man's love, or between two peoples arrayed on a battlefield, the message of most nineteenth-century Indian romances was the same: white victory came only with Indian extermination. According to white society's professed racial beliefs, these were triumphant, "happy" endings. Yet it is very clear that most of these stories' endings were intended to be tragic because the protagonists (and thus, by extension, the sympathetic author and reader) so often desired a *different* happy ending: one that would allow a happy marriage between the Indian woman and her white lover. Very few stories explicitly stated such a desire, but, as in the "tragic mulatta" literature, the presence of an almost unfailingly insipid, faint-hearted, and noticeably less attractive white woman often forced the white male character—and, by extension, the reader—to make rather unfavorable comparisons.

White women in fiction featuring Indian heroines were very rarely portrayed as the evil, cruel, or jealous types who sometimes appeared in "tragic mulatta" literature. More often, they were presented as models of the "cult of true womanhood," meek, passionless, pious, and glaringly unsuited for the frontier life of their white lovers. Interestingly, they often professed to love the Indian women who vied for the white male character—especially when the former conveniently managed to die off with the rest of her race. White women thus appeared as rather shadowy reminders of civilization creeping up on the wilderness; they were the inadvertent

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[27] Caruthers, *The Cavaliers of Virginia,* 1: 71, 72, 88.
[28] Cooper, *Mercedes,* 507.
[29] Chateaubriand, *Atala,* 46—47, 55.

extinguishers of the Indian race. The fact that authors specifically made white women much less admirable, beautiful, or interesting than the Indian characters suggests an intention to feed readers' nostalgic fantasies of an imagined, free, wild period of unfettered interracial love and sex.

"[T]he witching modesty and coy reserve of thy sex . . . puzzle the understanding of men." [30]

White Women

Very few authors of Indian romances bothered to fully describe their white, female characters. While Indian heroines were often minutely detailed—from the tops of their "ebony tresses" to the curves of their delightfully bare ankles—authors rarely mentioned even the white woman's hair color. In Cooper's *Mercedes,* the reader only learns what Mercedes herself looks like when her lover, the adventurer Luis, is "struck with a resemblance" between the Castilian heiress and the Haitian queen Ozema. Even though she is introduced a hundred or more pages before the Indian queen, Mercedes is therefore only described *through* Ozema. Cooper uses the opportunity to point out all the small differences that reflect their almost opposite natures. "Side by side, it would have been discovered that the face of Mercedes had the advantage in finesse and delicacy," Cooper states. "Her features and brow were nobler; her eye more illuminated by the intelligence within; . . . [her] expression generally was much more highly cultivated." Yet in terms of raw allure and sexuality, the Haitian queen was the clear superior. "On the score of animation, native frankness, ingenuousness, and all that witchery which ardent and undisguised feeling lends to woman," Cooper explains, "many might have preferred the confiding *abandon* of the beautiful young Indian."[31] Such a racial juxtaposition seems to have fascinated nineteenth-century readers and authors alike, since both "tragic mulatta" literature and Indian romances presented many blatant comparisons between rather boring white women and their beautiful, fascinating non-white counterparts.

In general, the white female characters in Indian romances were intended to be admired as noble, pious and pure—but not particularly attractive. When he first introduces Mercedes, Cooper does not provide the reader with a single adjective to describe her physical looks. Instead, he explains that "it was not the particular beauty of Dona Mercedes that rendered her appearance so remarkable and attractive," for she was not exceptionally beautiful. "There were," Cooper acknowledges, "many in that brilliant court who would generally be deemed fairer." Instead, Mercedes' attraction lay in the immense power of her virtue, for "no other maiden of Castile had a countenance so illuminated by the soul within." By contrast, every part of Ozema—her hair, eyes, teeth, skin, clothing, curvy limbs and "faultless" ankles—is described in exhaustive detail. Although she is supposed to resemble Mercedes, Ozema is described as the embodiment of the magnificent beauty of which Mercedes falls short: Luis finds her "more beautiful than even imagination could draw."[32]

Virginia, the white heroine in *The Cavaliers of Virginia,* is similarly described as *good* rather than beautiful. Her "loveliness" is described as "girlish" rather than womanly, and, like many of the white women in Indian romances, she is presented as a bud on the verge of flowering, "scarce passed her sixteenth birthday: and of course her figure was not yet rounded out to its full perfection of female loveliness." Such a description markedly contrasts with travel

[30] Cooper, *Mercedes,* 86.
[31] Ibid., 388.
[32] Ibid., 72, 392.

and fictional literature's depictions of young Indian women's precociously mature bodies. Virginia has a neck that is "of that pure, chaste, and lovely white which gives such an air of heavenly innocence," lips parted with "the most gentle and naïve laughter," eyelashes that are "long, fair, [and] dewy ," a head of "fair flaxen ringlets," and a "forehead of polished ivory." Such colorless, ethereal, spiritual adjectives call to mind the feeble type of white, female characters in Scott's *Ivanhoe* or the "tragic mulatta" literature. It is, furthermore, the kind of appearance devoid of sexuality. As the story's hero, Nathanial Bacon, tells Virginia, "beauty like yours [is] joined with such perfect innocence and such childlike simplicity."[33] It is, therefore, the kind of beauty that strikes a protective, almost paternal chord in men—but certainly not an ardent, lustful attraction.

Because authors of Indian romances and "tragic mulatta" stories played upon different sets of racial stereotypes, Indian heroines differed in some ways from "tragic mulattas." Yet there seem to have been only a few, stilted varieties of white female characters for antebellum writers to draw upon. Since the spoiled, cruel "southern belle" type could not really exist on the western frontier, the predominant white female appearing in Indian romances was the fair, frail, childlike prototype. The reality of white women's difficult, laborious, and often dangerous lives on the frontier was apparently impossible to portray in a literary tradition with such restricted female stereotypes.[34] Just as in the southern literature, these western women swooned at every sign of distress, shed tears at every provocation, and were so pious, juvenile, and passionless that they appeared asexual. Mary, the heroine of *Wild Western Scenes,* is a quintessential example of the almost painfully virtuous white heroines of Indian romances. She has thoughts "as pure as the morning dew," and "all her delights were the results of innocence." She has the "innocence of angels," so beatific that Nature itself is charmed by her: while tending her garden, "she smiled when [a] beautiful fawn touched her hand with its velvet tongue, and a tear dimmed her eye for an instant when she looked upon [a] stricken rose."[35] Indeed, Mary tends to cry at any provocation. When she reads the history of Charles I, she sheds a sparkling tear and cries "Ah me! I did not think that Christian men could be so cruel." Clearly, such a woman isn't fit for the "wild western scenes" that give the story its name, and the plot therefore revolves around various attempts to save her from evil men.

White women's faint-heartedness was often presented in marked contrast to Indian women's bravery. After watching a fight between white colonists and Indians, Virginia in *The Cavaliers* "sank upon the ground as powerless and exhausted as if she too had been actively engaged." Her one-time Indian servant Wyanokee, however, consents to become the queen of her tribe and leads them into battle herself. In *Mercedes,* the title character is described by her mother's best friend as a "tender plant" that she wants to protect from the "cold nursing of a

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[33] Caruthers, *The Cavaliers of Virginia,* 14, 15, 163.

[34] Only in later decades, after white women entered the frontier in increasing numbers, did a new prototype of white "fighting woman" like Calamity Jane and Annie Oakley enter the genre. Prior to that, the only type of white woman who could exhibit any kind of ferocity and true bravery, fighting alongside men and shooting guns, were "fallen" women—prostitutes, madams, or other women who had been victims of seduction. Often, their vengeance was wreaked on the men who ruined them. Clearly, however, these were not the classic Victorian female protagonists—nor were they usually the main characters. See: Laura McCall, "Armed and 'More or Less Dangerous:' Women and Violence in American Frontier Literature, 1820-1860," in *Lethal Imagination: Violence and Brutality in American History,* ed. Michael Bellesiles (New York: NYU Press, 1999); Daryl Jones, "Blood 'N Thunder: Virgins, Villains, and Violence in the Dime Novel Western,*" Journal of Popular Culture* 4, no. 2 (Fall, 1970).

[35] Jones, *Wild Western Scenes,* 140, 227.

selfish and unfeeling world."[36] But the Indian queen Ozema—who seems to be Mercedes' look-alike alter-ego—fights a battle to avoid a violent suitor and braves an ocean voyage to follow the white man she loves to Spain.

Sometimes, as in Hasting Weld's short story "Namaska," Indian heroines disdain white women's timidity and ineptitude. When the white hero, Herbert Morton, gets into an altercation with a few other white settlers, his white fiancé prevents him from drawing his sword. His devoted Indian admirer, Namaska, scoffs that she herself "would have held his quiver, and not have broken the point of his arrow," and then laughs at his frustration with his betrothed. Other times, Indian women take it upon themselves to defend their inept, white female friends. In Percy Bolingbroke St. John's popular dime novel *The Rose of Ouisconsin,* both the white and Indian heroines are captured by a vicious Indian warrior who aims to make them both his wives. When he attempts to carry off Alice (who, like the similar character in Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans,* conveniently faints) the Indian maiden grabs a rifle, throws herself at his feet to trip him up, and smashes the gun against his hand, sending his tomahawk spinning into the woods. In *Ticonderoga,* the princess Otaitsa tries to explain Indian women's fearlessness to her white friend, Edith. "There are times, sister," she says, "when a spirit enters into us that defies all, and fears nothing." As her own father told her, "the women of [the Oneida] are not as other women. Like the stone they are firm; like the rock they are lofty. They bear warriors for the nation. They teach them to do great deeds." Indeed, the author writes that Otaitsa is so courageous and noble, so possessed of that "strong, stoical self command which characterized the Indian warrior," that some "might have supposed her . . . a man and a chief." In this story, at least, this is not a deterrent characteristic: indeed, by the end of this story, brave warriors like Otaitsa survive, and faint-hearted maidens like Edith die.[37]

Clearly, authors had difficulty confronting the paradox of a frail, timid, Victorian lady caught in the whirlwind of the western wilds. While an Indian heroine could be endowed with all the ardor and sensuality ascribed to her race, white female characters were often as passionless as they were faint-hearted. Authors seemed almost obsessively careful in their attempt to ascribe only the most pious, chaste feelings to their white characters. This tended to amplify the tragic end of thwarted interracial love because it pushed the white hero into the frigid, trembling arms of his less-than-ardent white lover instead of the warm, devoted embrace of his Indian admirer.

True to the pattern of interracial juxtaposition, even the loving gazes of Virginia and Wyanokee are compared in *The Cavaliers.* While Virginia gazes at her wounded lover, Nathaniel Bacon, "long and feelingly," the author hastily asserts that "there was naught of passion in that gaze—it was pure and heavenly in its origin, as in its motive." In contrast, Wyanokee stares at Bacon with "no melting and sympathizing tear [to] softe[n] the brilliant and penetrating eye . . . ; there was excitement, deep excitement."[38] Even though Wyanokee saves Bacon multiple times from fiendish Indian captors, he still chooses Virginia for his wife and abandons the Indian queen to her tribal exile.

In *Mercedes,* the title character's dogged chastity and restraint become a theme of the love triangle that emerges. In the beginning of the story, she refuses to trust the advances of the

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[36] Cooper, *Mercedes,* 149.

[37] Hastings Weld, "Namaska; or, the Captives: a Legend of Mount Wollaston," in *Graham's Magazine*, January 1843, 146; Percy Bolingbroke St. John, *The Rose of Ouisconsin* (London: Hayward and Adam, 1845), 152, 153; James, *Ticonderoga,* 38, 89, 69.

[38] Caruthers, *The Cavaliers of Virginia,* 1: 129-130.

aristocratic adventurer, Luis de Bobadilla, and encourages him to join Columbus's voyage so as to test his devotion. Even though she professes to love him, she is "high-principled" and "self-denying," meeting her ardent suitor's declarations of passion with only "a tenderness that seemed to lose all other considerations of love." Indeed, even her flush is of a "holy enthusiasm," her face "flowing with pious ardor" rather than anything remotely sexual. The stricken Luis, on the verge of departure, groans that he wishes he could read her heart "for, while the witching modesty and coy reserve of thy sex, serve but to bind us so much the closer in thy chains, they puzzle the understanding of men." Finally, in great frustration, he cries out "Pardon me, most beloved Mercedes, thy coldness and aversion sometimes madden me."[39] When, after a long voyage to the New World, Luis returns with the Indian queen Ozema, it is no wonder that both Mercedes and the rest of the court suspect that the exotic maiden has replaced the Castilian heiress in Luis's fancies; after all, Ozema is so much more loving. She openly and often declares her love for Luis, and even abandons her people to follow him to Spain. Furthermore, while Mercedes requires Luis to journey halfway across the world to prove his willingness for marriage, Ozema mistakenly believes that a simple gift from him sealed their nuptial vows. Nonetheless, Luis chooses Mercedes' lukewarm affections over Ozema's powerful attachment, dooming the latter to death by heartbreak.

Edith, the white heroine of *Ticonderoga*, is very similar to Mercedes in that she, too, appears incapable of passionate sentiments. When introduced to the reader, she has a heart that "had never been complicated with even a thought of love. . . . [S]he had excluded it even from her day dreams. She knew that there was such a thing as passion . . . but she tried not to seek it out." When she finally does profess to fall in love, she still seems incapable of displaying any emotion. When her lover, Lord H, is ready to profess his feelings for her, she frantically stops him by begging "Oh, not now—not now—spare me a little still." And when she finally consents to be his wife, she shrinks from physical contact: "though [his] strong, manly arm was fondly thrown around her waist, she escaped from its warm clasp, and cast herself upon the bosom of her father."[40] The brave Indian heroine Otaitsa, on the other hand, openly declares her love for Edith's brother Walter, unabashedly embraces him, and even throws herself into terrible peril in order to save his life. In this story, at least, the Indian woman's devotion is rewarded, and she marries Edith's brother. Edith herself, however, dies a virgin, a victim of the terrible frontier violence between Indians and white settlers that she is so woefully unsuited to endure.

Whether given a happy or tragic ending, every single Indian romance shared a similar theme: the Indian heroine's total, unconditional love for a white man. In this way, the stories were meant to follow the lines of the original Pocahontas legend. The Indian maiden, always irresistibly drawn to the white man, spurns the attentions of Indian warriors and abandons her people to follow her love. Sometimes her love is rewarded, and sometimes it is unrequited or betrayed, but it is always freely and fully given. White heroes do not agonize over their Indian lovers' attachments, painfully chip away at their chastity, or even go to much trouble to marry them.

In Custis's beloved Pocahontas play, the Indian princess attempts to explain to the audience her reasons for betraying her people. "Come good, come ill," she vows, "Pocahontas will be the friend of the English. I know not how it is, but my attachments became fix'd upon the strangers the first moment I beheld them." According to nineteenth-century racial thinking, this

[39] Cooper, *Mercedes,* 86, 87, 93, 158, 162.
[40] James, *Ticonderoga,* 12, 51, 53.

made total sense: all women of all races were thought to be cognizant of the obvious superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race, which made white men utterly irresistible. "Albeit the race to which I owe my birth is an unmixed one," Pocahontas acknowledges, "I love the Yengeese. . . . The white men are my brethren." The princess's fellow Indians sadly acknowledge her change of allegiance. Her old admirer grudgingly admits that "she has seen the strangers and no longer looks upon an Indian warrior with favour or regard." In *The Cavaliers of Virginia,* the Indian queen Wyanokee, who was "civilized" in the plantation household of a white, Virginian family, looks upon her own Indian admirer, Red Feather Jack, "with ineffable scorn and contempt, produced as much, doubtless, by his undignified and unnational habits, as by what she considered his inferior rank and understanding."[41] Antebellum readers, coached in the lessons of the racial hierarchy, understood that Indian men didn't stand a chance against the superior looks, refinement, and intelligence of white men.

It was also understood that Indian women's racial inferiority—as well as their racial predisposition to intense passions—made them eternal, unfailing worshippers of superior white men. When Pocahontas lies dying in London at the end of Custis' play, her grief-stricken husband John Rolfe asks if she repents her choice to marry him. "Such doubt wrongs Pocahontas," the princess says. "Whene'er a forest maiden gives her heart, around her the Great Spirit casts a spell; Before her eyes, the husband of her soul, even while absent, ever seems to stand, and from her sight shuts out all other men."[42] By the publication of this play in 1830, readers had absorbed enough stereotypes from both fictional and travel literature to accept such a generalization about *all* "forest maidens" rather than just Pocahontas herself.

According to the travel literature, Indian women were so completely devoted to their white lovers that they did not need a marriage ceremony to cement their vows. Thus, like the quadroons of "tragic mulatta" literature, fictional Indian women are content to be married, as Ozema says in *Mercedes,* "in [the] heart." This commitment, more binding than any ceremony, motivates Indian heroines to shun all other admirers, pursue their lovers to the ends of the earth, and sacrifice their own lives for them. In the exceptionally popular story *Malaeska*—also considered the first dime novel and the first western—the title character is utterly infatuated with a white trapper. She has no designs on him, no need for marriage or any other binding commitment, for "her untutored heart, rich in its natural affections, had no aim, no object, but what centered in the love she bore her white [lover]." This, the author explains, is because "the feelings which in civilized life are scattered over a thousand objects were, in her bosom, centered in one single being; . . . love was all-powerful in that wild heart." If the author intended antebellum readers to accept this statement as fact, Indian women were therefore implied to be capable of deeper, truer love than civilized white women. In several stories, Indian women announce that their hearts have been so fully given to their white lovers that they would die without them. "La-u-na must see her Young Eagle, or go to the land of spirits," the Indian heroine of *Wild Western Scenes* tells her white lover Walter, whom she has pursued from his Indian captivity to his reunion with white society. Otherwise, she announces, she will "find a cool shade and lie down . . . will sing a low song . . . will close her eyes and die."[43]

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[41] Custis, *Pocahontas,* 10, 126, 29; Caruthers, *The Cavaliers of Virginia,* 1: 92.
[42] Custis, *Pocahontas,* 221.
[43] Cooper, *Mercedes,* 496; Ann Stephens, "Malaeska*;* the Indian Wife of the White Hunter," in *Reading the West: An Anthology of Dime Westerns,* ed. Bill Brown (1839; repr., Boston: Bedford Books, 1997), 93; Jones, *Wild Western Scenes,* 231.

Indeed, Indian heroines seem all too willing to die for their white lovers. In almost every Indian romance, the Indian heroine reenacts a kind of Pocahontas sacrifice. This, of course, was the greatest appeal of the Pocahontas story, the scene that was repeated and glorified far more than her marriage with John Rolfe. Nineteenth-century readers appeared utterly fascinated by the climactic outpouring of passion, bravery, and love, especially since it seemed to validate the irresistible superiority of the white race. Thus while white women in nineteenth-century romances almost always need saving themselves (after all, they usually faint when anyone else is in danger), non-white women like Indians and quadroons take action, often saving white men and women alike.

In *The Cavaliers of Virginia,* Wyanokee saves her beloved, Nathaniel Bacon, by throwing herself between him and his torturers. "Strike your tomahawks here, into the daughter of your chief, . . . but harm not the defenceless stranger," she cries out. "Never, never [will I let you kill him] unless you cleave off these hands with which I will protect him from your fury." In *Mercedes,* Ozema saves Luis from a vicious band of attacking Indians by "thr[owing] herself before Luis, with her arms meekly placed on her bosom . . . like the Pocahontas of our own history." In *Ticonderoga,* Otaitsa not only saves the white woman Edith from the evil Indian warrior who seeks to make them both his wives, but also orchestrates a magnificent sacrifice for Edith's brother, Walter. Almost frantic with fear for his life (he is, after all, her own lover,) she cries out "Oh, that I could save him all by myself—that I might buy him from his bonds by my own nets alone—ay, or even by my own blood! . . . that were joyful indeed!" Her own efforts, however, would not be enough, so Otaitsa magnifies the Pocahontas sacrifice a hundredfold by including *all* the women in her tribe. When he is led out to his death, the women announce "if ye slay the youth, ye slay us," and every one pulls out a knife and aims it at her breast. Such tragic sacrifices are not seen as such by the Indian women themselves: as Otaitsa announces, their success would be "joyful." In the short story "Northington," the Indian heroine who saves her white lover's life by taking the arrow meant for him gasps with her dying breath "I have given my life for yours. . . . I looked not for so proud and happy a destiny."[44]

Such sacrifices would have been accepted as "safe" plotlines by antebellum readers were they all to end in the Indian woman's death or the white man's choice of a white wife. Yet authors almost always made the white heroes' powerful attraction to infatuated Indian women very clear. Some even chose to highlight Indian women's superiority to white women by having their own, white heroes proclaim it. Thus authors specifically steered their readers toward a preference for the non-white heroines not only by endowing them with more beauty, passion, bravery and love, but also by pointing out their white heroes' powerful attraction. Such blatant advantages, even in stories that end with Indian extermination and the triumph of white love, therefore contained hints of a threat to white femininity.

"Her beauty, . . . her unfeigned devotion, . . . her innocence, her winning simplicity, and her modest joyousness and nature, are sufficient to win a lover from any Spanish maiden."[45]

The Threat

[44] Caruthers, *The Cavaliers of Virginia,* 2: 16, 18—20; Cooper, *Mercedes,* 400; James, *Ticonderoga,* 71, 115; Orne, "Northington," 277.

[45] Cooper, *Mercedes,* 502.

In Davis' Pocahontas story, John Rolfe announces that "he had never witnessed in any European female, beauty more lovely, sensibility more tender, innocence more unsuspecting, or grace more attractive" than in Pocahontas. William Caruthers, too, is unabashed in his portrayal of white men's especial predilection for the beautiful Wyanokee in *The Cavaliers of Virginia*. "Half the young cavaliers in Jamestown," he asserts, "would have been willing devotees at the shrine of Wyanokee's beauty." In *Mercedes,* Cooper voices Ozema's superiority to Mercedes through a variety of different characters. Sancho, a common sailor who befriended Luis during Columbus's voyage, tells the Spanish court that Ozema is "of a beauty so rare, that the fairest dames of Castile need look to it, if they wish not to be outdone." Indeed, he brashly states, the Indian princess "surpass[es] in beauty the daughters of our own blessed queen." Convinced that Luis has brought Ozema with him because he is in love with her, the crushed Mercedes herself admits that "her beauty, . . . her unfeigned devotion, . . . her innocence, her winning simplicity, and her modest joyousness and nature, are sufficient to win a lover from any Spanish maiden." And Mercedes' pseudo-mother, the Countess Beatriz, reluctantly acknowledges that Ozema's "unfettered conduct and half-attired person" may be particularly attractive to a young man because they are "lacking to the air and manners of a high-born Spanish damsel."[46] The fact that Luis himself chooses Mercedes over Ozema is rather irrelevant—it is clear that the majority of other characters, even including Queen Isabella, expect him to choose the Indian queen. Indeed, his ultimate choice of the Spanish maiden appears intended to both surprise the characters and disappoint the reader, especially since it results in the death of a heartbroken Ozema.

This was the nature of the wider threat implicit in Indian romances. Although the majority of stories were meant to end "safely," with the doom of the Indian woman secured either by her sacrificial death, failed competition with a white woman, the hostility of white society, or the extermination of her race, many authors steered their readers toward a preference for an alternate ending. Thus the moral lesson emerging from these stories does not conform to stereotypical antebellum beliefs. Rather than focusing on the unnaturalness of interracial mixture, the superiority of white women, or the beneficial extermination of the Indians, the stories focus on the inability of white men or white society to truly value Indian women, and the tragedy emerging from the resultant disappearance of the noblest of savages: the "Pocahontas figure." Such endings suggest a latent desire among antebellum authors and readers for a society that would accept interracial relations—and, in some cases, interracial polygyny.

The Cavaliers of Virginia, Mercedes of Castile, and *Atala* are all examples of romances that end in tragedy for the Indian heroine because of the presence of white women. In each story, the message appears to be that women of both races cannot live in love simultaneously; eventually, one must triumph and the other disappear. In *The Cavaliers,* the beautiful queen Wyanokee is betrayed by her beloved, Nathaniel Bacon, whom she had earlier saved from torture in a Pocahontas-sacrifice. He chooses her old mistress, Virginia, as his bride, and Wyanokee's village is torched and her people exiled. Wyanokee delivers a harsh lesson to both Bacon and the reader, lamenting the "cruel and treacherous" white men and "the wrongs which your people have visited upon ours." The hypocrisy she pinpoints applies to both Bacon himself, who apologizes for all the wrongs, and to the reader, who shares her grief from the safe distance of centuries. "Kind indeed is the white man's sympathy," she scoffs. "He applies the torch to the wigwam of his red friend, shoots at his women and children as they run from the destruction

[46] Davis, *Captain Smith and Princess Pocahontas,* 90; Caruthers, *The Cavaliers of Virginia,* 1: 71; Cooper, *Mercedes,* 448, 449, 502, 476.

within, and then he weeps over the ruins which his own hands have made."[47] Such a message seems intended to scold white men—both the characters themselves and real people—for their choices to abandon Indian admirers for white women, and to allow the former's extermination despite their obvious devotion and sacrifice.

In *Mercedes,* Luis is forced to choose between Mercedes and Ozema. When he announces his betrothal to the Spanish heiress, Ozema languishes for a few, stricken days, and then dies of intense heartbreak. Such an ending is clearly not meant to be happy for either the characters or the reader, and the author himself announces his dissatisfaction with it by presenting a final message to the reader. First explaining that Mercedes and Luis's marriage was forever troubled by the sadness of Ozema's death, Cooper goes on to state that Spain's history was filled with "other Luis de Bobadillas" and "other Mercedes," but there was "only one Ozema. She appeared at court, . . . and, for a time, blazed like a star that had just risen in a pure atmosphere. Her career, however, was short, dying young and lamented."[48] Such a statement suggests Cooper's opinion that Luis's choice is faulty: white women like Mercedes are a dime a dozen, but truly exceptional women like Ozema are one of a kind. Again, the message seems to highlight the tragedy of the extermination of such women by white men's destructive choices.

In *Atala,* the competition between white and Indian women takes place within the soul of the title character herself. Half Indian and half white, she struggles with the passion her Indian heart feels for her lover, Chactas, and the eternal chastity she promised her white mother. Rather than break that filial vow by giving into the irresistible sexual attraction she feels for Chactas, Atala kills herself. As she lays dying, a white pastor tells her that her death was for naught, for God would have understood her love for Chactas. Aware now of the pointlessness of her death, Atalan groans to Chactas that "virginity . . . eats away my life; why! Even now . . . , I bear with me regret at never having been thine!"[49] The story therefore ends with all three characters lamenting the terrible influence of white ideas on Indian bodies, and the tragic victory of white virtue over Indian passion. The reader is therefore left with the suggestion that, had Indian love been allowed to triumph over white restraints, and had sexuality triumphed over chastity, the story would have ended happily.

Captain Smith and Princess Pocahontas, "Jocassee Valley," "A Legend of the Cherokee," and *Malaeska* are all examples of stories that do not include white women, but nonetheless end in the Indian woman's death because of the destructive, prejudiced actions of white society. In *Captain Smith,* the story ends with Pocahontas' death in London, in the arms of her devoted husband, John Rolfe. As though this were the last, happy interracial romance to ever occur, Davis ends his story with the lament "Alas! How changed is now the scene on the parent river of the Indian princess! . . . The race of Indians has been destroyed by the inroads of the whites!" The real tragedy of this extermination, Davis seems to imply, is that it ended the free, happy interracial romances that existed during Pocahontas's lifetime. "No longer," Davis grieves, "are the ebon tresses of the Indian nymph fanned by the evening gale, as she reclines her head upon the bosom, and listens to the vows of her roving lover."[50] In this way, he allows his reader to nostalgically remember an imagined time of unfettered, blissful interracial romance.

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[47] Caruthers, *The Cavaliers of Virginia,* 2: 243—244, 75.
[48] Cooper, *Mercedes,* 530.
[49] Chateaubriand, *Atala,* 44.
[50] Davis, *Captain Smith and Princess Pocahontas,* 114.

A number of stories seem almost to have reveled in white guilt. In the short-story "Jocassee Valley," the beautiful princess Omyoux promises to marry her white lover even though their people are at war. He, however, betrays her by joining his people in a battle against the Indians, burning the village and slaughtering her entire tribe. When he finds her, he cries out passionately "you are mine now, Omyoux!'" But she simply points to her village and then, when he touches her arm, shrieks and throws herself off a waterfall. Tallu in "A Legend of the Cherokee" chooses the same suicide when her white admirer tries to lure her away from her tribe. "White Fox has come to steal the wigwam of the Indian brave," she accuses, "and to clip [my] wings."[51] Such stories seem to blame white men for their destructiveness, their inability to find peace with the Indians, and their dogged pursuit of ownership.

In *Malaeska*, the title character chooses the opposite path to Omyoux and Tallu: after the death of her white lover at the hands of her own tribesmen, she abandons them to war with the whites and seeks out her lover's family. Even then, however, the Indian heroine is doomed, for her son's white grandparents refuse to accept her into their society. Desperate to remain by her child's side, she consents to relinquish any claims to motherhood and becomes a servant in the white household. The author emphasizes the cruelty of this situation, and the injustice of a society so blinded by skin color that it refuses to acknowledge an exemplary wife and mother. In the end, Malaeska's son grows up ignorant of his origins, and falls in love with a white girl. When Malaeska finally reveals her identity to him, he throws himself over a waterfall rather than live, as he says, with "stained" blood. His white lover spends her days a grief-stricken spinster, and Malaeska herself dies soon after, "the heart-broken victim of an unnatural marriage."[52] Such a message at the story's conclusion appears, at first, to blame miscegenation for the tragedy. Placed within the context of the wider plot, however, the real moral seems to concern the destructive prejudices of white society. Had it not deemed the marriage "unnatural" in the first place, and had such pains not been taken to hide identities and punish bloodlines, the tragedies would never have occurred.

A few stories, almost always written by Europeans and therefore somewhat separate from America's racial issues, did allow a "happy" ending of interracial marriage. Nonetheless, such endings still required a kind of "death" for one race or the other: either the white woman's actual, fatal end or the Indian woman's renunciation of her heritage. In the Pocahontas stories, for example, Pocahontas does marry John Rolfe, and she does have a child—but she also becomes thoroughly Europeanized, immersing herself in white culture and society and even dying in London, far from her own people. In the short story "The Trapper's Bride," Moama and her trapper husband live happily ever after—but only because he steals her from her people and hides her in his wigwam. In *Wild Western Scenes*, the white characters magnanimously decide that La-u-na and her white lover, William, can "be happy together, if they dwell with us." Indeed, this is the *only* way their happiness can be allowed, and therefore La-u-na wanders off to find "a lonely spot" where she "[pours] forth a farewell song to the whispering spirits of her fathers." Nonetheless, her tears soon dry, for, the author explains, "while the race from which she separated is doomed to extinction in the forest, . . . the Anglo-Saxon race may yet be destined to sway the councils of a mighty empire."[53] In other words, these stories are "happy" because the

[51] Ellet, "Jocassee Valley," 300-301; S.H.M, "A Legend of the Cherokee," 267.
[52] Stephens, "Malaeska," 253.
[53] Jones, *Wild Western Scenes,* 263.

Indian heroine chooses to ally herself with the victorious race, passing her noble blood down though generations of great, white families just like Pocahontas was believed to have done.

Obviously, such absorption into white society would have required Indian women to adapt their dress, speech, and habits as well. Thus, in *The Rose of Ousiconsin*, the Indian heroine needs to whiten before marrying the white trapper, Harry, and so a white family dresses her in a cotton dress, braids her hair in the English fashion, and teaches her to stand with demure, "downcast eyes." Similarly, in the short story "The Whitedove of the Menominees," the trapper Mark feels "impelled by the lively intelligence of Whitedove to teach her to read and write," and soon his wife becomes a "fashionable novel-reader" rather than a "savage."[54]

Ticonderoga is the only story that ends with both the death of a white woman and the successful marriage of an Indian woman to a white man. Although such an ending is exceptional and was probably rather risqué, it nonetheless remains true to the patterned theme of the impossibility of simultaneous white and Indian female love. Furthermore, it teases the reader with a number of suggestive passages that seem to imply an alternate ending. Like many other Indian romances, it focuses extensive attention on the relationship between the white and Indian female characters, Edith and Otaitsa. In one scene, Edith rushes to greet Otaitsa when the latter returns from a sojourn with her lover, Edith's brother Walter. The author then presents a pointedly sexual scene in which "the beautiful arms of the Indian girl who had sat with Walter in the morning, were round the fair form of his sister, and her lips pressed on hers." Polygyny is, of course, impossible because Edith and Walter are siblings, but the author appears intent on presenting the titillating fantasy for the reader. "While the young Oneida almost lay upon the bosom of her white friend," the author describes, "her beautiful dark eyes were turned towards her lover." Thus the reader is invited to watch an apparently interracial, homoerotic scene through Walter's eyes. Throughout the story, the reader is treated to various intimate scenes in which Edith and Otaitsa weep on each others' bosoms (which provocatively heave in grief) and even "lay down to sleep in each other's arms."[55] Although polygyny is not a feasible alternate ending, the story does suggest that both women could have lived in loving harmony as sisters-in-law. Indeed, they often address each other as "sister," a term that is all the more suggestive because of travel literature's assertion that most women who engaged in polygyny were siblings.

Other stories were much more explicit about the possibility of polygyny. In *The Rose of Ouisconsin*, both the Indian and white heroines are captured by the evil Indian warrior Red Hand, who plans to make both of them his wives. Such a notion is clearly meant to repulse the reader—but only because an Indian man is involved. Indeed, the author seems to revel in titillating descriptions of the two women together, feeding the fantasies of a reader who may imagine himself in Red Hand's position. When the Indian warrior enters the tent in which Alice and Morning Sun are imprisoned, he finds the two women with "their arms encircling one another fondly. The pale English girl sat beside her Indian friend, whose deep rose skin formed a singular contrast." Both formed "the very picture of youth and beauty"—as well as, of course, a titillating portrait of alluring racial contrasts.[56]

Because he is an Indian man, Red Hand is never allowed to commit the atrocity of marriage with a white woman, and so the possibility of polygyny is avoided. Yet other stories

[54] St. John, *The Rose of Ouisconsin*, 163; James Hogg Titan, "The Whitedove of the Menominees," in *Hogg's Weekly Instructor* (Edinburgh: James Hogg, 1849), 2: 56.
[55] James, *Tionderoga*, 22, 71.
[56] St. John, *The Rose of Ouisconsin*, 141.

actually presented their white heroes with the option. In fact, the hero's inevitable choice to forgo the possibility by choosing the white woman contributes to the tragic ending, leaving a rather ambiguous message: would polygyny have saved all the characters' lives? Were the sexually straightjacketed traditions of white society and the selfish jealousy of white women the only things preventing racial peace and happy marriages?

In *The Cavaliers of Virginia,* the white woman Virginia is Wyanokee's mistress, friend, and "benefactor" all in one. It is she who "refines" Wyanokee, dressing her in European clothes, teaching her English, and instructing her in etiquette. In the usual, suggestively sexual language employed by so many authors to describe scenes between white and Indian women, Caruthers writes that gentle Virginia could "work upon [Wyanokee's] sensibilities . . . like a skillful musician upon a finely toned instrument." Indeed, the white woman would often "awake from her slumbers" to find the Indian girl "stooping over her couch." Both women are in love with Nathanial Bacon, the white hero, but it is Wyanokee who offers the opportunity of polygyny. When her tribe captures Bacon, the Indian girl—who has been made their queen—offers to marry him in order to save his life. Like all Indian marriages, it would not prevent him from taking Virginia as his lawfully wedded wife. Instead, however, Bacon chooses to marry Virginia and his people destroy Wyanokee's village and exile her entire tribe to the West. As she watches the Indian maiden trudge into the distance with her dying race, Virginia sobs aloud. "A hope had till now lingered in her heart, that Wyanokee would . . . once more take up her abode in her house," but "she knew that she looked upon the Indian maiden for the last time on earth."[57] Although Virginia herself is certainly not referring to polygyny, the statement reminds the reader of the thwarted opportunity that could have saved the lives and happiness of all.

Cooper's *Mercedes* presents what is perhaps the most explicit opportunity for polygyny in the entire literary canon. Besides the fact that Mercedes and Ozema look eerily alike, Cooper emphasizes their mutual admiration and love. Mercedes, he writes, "received [Ozema] like a sister," even though she believed the Indian woman to have stolen Luis's heart. "Spite of our causes of dissatisfaction," Mercedes' pseudo-mother Countess Beatriz admits, "she and I both love [Ozema] already, and could take her to our hearts forever." When the Indian queen learns that Luis prefers Mercedes, she suggests polygyny as a perfect solution. After all, as argued in much of the travel literature, polygyny could eradicate jealousies and enable women to live in loving, sisterly harmony. Ozema suggests that she be Luis's "second wife—lower wife—because he love next best." Completely devoid of selfish feelings, the Indian woman puts Luis's happiness before her own, vowing that jealousy would never stand in the way of her affection. Indeed, Ozema says, she would be "fifty, hundred wife to dear Luis!" Luis's own feelings on the issue are never actually stated; Mercedes interrupts the choice by vowing that she would never allow it. "As a wife," she says, "I should sink beneath the weight of blighted affections." In fact, she admits that she distrusts Luis's love, accusing him that "thou has not been able to control thy affections . . . to the strange novelties that have surrounded Ozema. . . . Marry me, loving another better, thou canst not."[58] Luis is therefore forced to choose his white wife, and Ozema dies of grief. The jealousy of a white woman thus secures the tragic fate of the Indian queen whom even the author acknowledges was the only truly exceptional, exemplary character.

No matter what its plotline and ending, every Indian romance contained a similar theme: both races could not exist simultaneously, and the Indians were quickly falling to the white

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[57] Carthuers, *The Cavaliers of Virginia,* 1: 73; 2: 244.
[58] Cooper, *Mercedes,* 474, 477, 515, 502, 503.

onslaught. Such a message allowed for a degree of fanciful nostalgia: the female Indian characters could be the equals or even the superiors of white women because, ultimately, they were doomed to extinction. Yet as the West suddenly opened up to white men in the nineteenth century, the threat of such fantasies became very real. White men could "safely" fantasize about Indian women when they were harmlessly between the pages of historical novels, but the West opened up the possibility of real encounters and actual polygyny. In the antebellum West, Indian women were far more numerous than white women, and institutionalized white society did not exist in enough force to prevent white men from re-enacting the interracial romances they read about. Indeed, as the century wore on, fictional and travel literature intersected to create a contradictory and yet inescapably fascinating image of Indian women that could now be seen as a real *alternative* to white women. In fictional literature, white society or white women were always present to prevent polygyny, happy interracial marriages, or racial peace. In the "wilds" of the West, however, white men could reinvent their own "happy endings," living out their own, alternate resolutions to racial romances and the "crisis of femininity."

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"Women of All Colors"[1]
Racial Rainbows in Spanish America

Just after his twenty-second birthday, Timothy Osborn of Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts sailed into San Francisco on the aptly named *Splendid,* weighed down with all the heavy, hardy tools of a miner's life but buoyed by his dreams of magnificent wealth and storybook romance. A diligent journal-writer, he daily confided both his disappointing realities—mounds and mounds of gold-less dirt—and his hopeful fantasies of beautiful women enamored of his adventurous spirit and destined riches. Surrounded by men in his camps, he spent long hours chatting or writing about "the girls we left behind us," recalling the "bright eyes" that "served as shrines at which I offered up my purest affections."[2]

The problem for Timothy was that his boyhood had been spent among the respectable white girls of middle-class New England society, those "beau ideal[s] of my brightest dreams of beauty and innocence." He confessed to his diary that he had never actually kissed a girl, though he spent many hours daydreaming about the desired embraces of his cousin Annie. "I am too much of a coward when I am addressing ladies," he lamented to his diary, "and am too apt to look upon them as a little above earthly objects." Indeed, in his journal the white women of his memories—especially the lovely Annie—appear as nondescript, sexless angels, endowed with "sweet smiles" and "bright eyes" but devoid of color, form, or personality.[3]

Perhaps it is no wonder, then, that Timothy's rhapsodies about the girls back home quickly transformed into fantasies about the heroines of the books he toted around the camps with him: those dark, voluptuous, fiery "*señoritas*" of contemporary travelogues and frontier fiction.[4] When introduced to a soldier who had fought in the Mexican-American War some eight years before, Timothy badgered him for tales of Mexico City. "How I would like to pass a summer in the ancient capital of the Aztecs," he scribbled excitedly, "become familiar with the language and the people, especially the señoritas!" He immersed himself in novels on the subject, which gave him delicious dreams that he confessed in a secret code in the margins of his diary. One of his favorites involved "some young señorita in the City of Mexico, whom I fancied I was deeply enamored with. Moreover, she was rich and accomplished, could speak English indifferently well, and was over-anxious to see 'Los Estados Unidos!' Had I not awoke by the cry of 'supper!' I should no doubt have gratified her."[5]

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[1] The title of this chapter is derived from a quote by William Watts Hart Davis, a travel writer and the U.S. Attorney for New Mexico. He mentioned the array of women's "colors" quite often in his book *El Gringo.* In Santa Fe, for example, he appreciated the women "of all colors, from the fair skin of the pure Spanish blood to a good wholesome Indian brown." Davis, *El Gringo,* 281.

[2] July 18, 1850, Timothy C. Osborn Journal.

[3] July 18, 1850, October 19, 1850, August 18, 180, in Ibid.

[4] This work will continue to refer to Spanish American women as "señoritas," without quotation marks, as this was the preferred term of almost every travelogue, diary, letter, or fictional story.

[5] November 28, 1850, December 10, 1850, in Ibid. Many nineteenth-century diaries contained coded sections. Many diary-writers, especially those on voyages of adventure or exploration like the Gold Rush participants, wrote their diaries with an intended public audience. Some hoped to publish them as travelogues, but most simply intended to present them to family members or friends, or to keep them for posterity. Because most diaries were therefore not

Timothy seemed to think that the pretty *señoritas* would be far more likely to "gratify" him than the tight-laced Puritan descendants back East. Disillusioned with mining and bored with the camp lifestyle, he soon took a job in a store in Stockton, where his diary entries increasingly featured the doings of the myriad Spanish American women who populated the town. He wrote of peeping into windows of dance houses to watch them dance fandangos, and even into private adobe houses where he confessed that the lovely black eyes of the *señoritas* put those of the "would-be belles at home . . . in a total eclipse." Very soon, one *señorita* in particular eclipsed all the other white women who flitted through his daydreams. "Talk to me of 'American Belles' no longer," Timothy announced, because a young "Chilena" he'd glimpsed in a Stockton store that morning was "positively and without any exception . . . the most beautiful girl I ever saw!" A perfect blend of innocence and sexuality, she was "a little endishabille about the bodice of her dress," the result of being without a corset and thus very free about the bosom, but nonetheless "the picture of innocence and beauty!" Timothy spent weeks searching desperately for another glimpse of the girl, imagining her to be his key to all the exotic locales of his fantasies. "I wonder shall I ever pass a winter in some gay Spanish city," he mused in his diary, "where bright black eyes and smiling faces will greet me as 'Amigo Americano'?" As he searched, he became an ever greater champion of *señoritas* over American women, finding them more beautiful, loving, and carefree. "One prominent objection often urged by the virtuous(?) against the Spaniards," he wrote, inserting a sarcastic question mark beside his description of the righteously moral, "is their loose idea of propriety in their conduct between the sexes! May it not be as liable to be the too contracted ideas of the American's view of virtue! It is a difficult matter to decide."[6]

It was indeed. The incorporation of new western territories, as well as Spanish America's independence from Spain, brought American men into increasing contact with Spanish American women—especially Mexicans. Travelers, settlers, trappers, traders, gold miners and soldiers confessed themselves fascinated by the appearance, perceived characteristics, and sexual culture of the exotic *señoritas*, all of which clashed with what Timothy termed "the contracted ideas of Americans' view of virtue." For many men, however—Timothy included—this was exactly their appeal.

The borderlands became a place of great opportunity for many American men in the nineteenth century. Gold, trade, land, and power seemed everywhere available, offered on the proverbial silver platter by newly independent Spanish colonies eager for trade and protection, and a United States captivated by a vision of "manifest destiny." Spanish American women not only became the symbol of the inviting, reportedly fertile lands of their nations, but also their key: after all, marriage to a prominent *señorita* could bestow great swaths of western land on a lucky foreigner. White, American men were more open about their love and lust for Spanish American women than those of any other, non-white race. While American leaders and policy-makers tended either to ignore or excoriate interracial relations between white men and Indian or black women, they sometimes actively encouraged intimacy with Spanish American women. American society and its legal systems, moreover, were far more likely to accept and even encourage the legitimate marriage of a white man to a Spanish American *señorita* than to any

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entirely private, many writers used code when relaying something secret. Virtually all of Timothy's coded sections, for example, concern women: Indian girls he saw bare-breasted, sexual dreams or fantasies, sightings of particularly alluring ladies, etc.

[6] January 1, 1850, January 19, 1851, January 15, 1850, January 19, 1850, in Ibid.

other non-white woman. Finally, American frontier fiction not only presented the *señorita* as the familiar prototype of a beautiful, brave, non-white heroine, but also commonly allowed her the happy ending of interracial marriage and assimilation into white, American society that was rarely given to Indian or quadroon heroines. Spanish American women—and particularly Mexicans, as America's close neighbors—therefore posed perhaps the biggest threat of the "crisis of femininity."

"Like the Sabine virgins, [Mexico] will learn to love her ravisher."[7]

Borderworlds: The United States and Spanish America in the Nineteenth Century

Prior to the nineteenth century, Spain's strict trade embargo, the vast, arid frontier of northern Mexico, and the region's powerful, dangerous Indian tribes kept the majority of Americans from significant interaction with Spanish American peoples. After independence in 1821, however, the new Mexican republic sought both to foster trade with the United States and to populate and strengthen its frontier. Very rapidly, new trade routes like the Santa Fe Trail opened up, and a lucrative overland trade network ushered in increasing numbers of Mexicans and Americans alike.[8]

The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 brought Americans far closer to Mexican lands, and by the 1820s western settlers were pouring into the Mexican frontier at the same rate as they fanned out to the American territories further north. The northern regions may have offered good farming land and Indian trade, but Mexican lands dangled even greater enticements before opportunistic American men. The Rio Grande trade between New York, Philadelphia, and New Orleans, en route to Monterrey, became a dominant source of income for many Mexicans after independence. American merchants, businessmen, and professionals were welcome in the small towns and villages on the Mexican frontier as a boost to their sparse populations and fledgling economies. As the fur trade waned in the 1830s, many American trappers and traders moved into Mexican territories and found new economic opportunities in frontier towns.[9]

Mexican officials also actively invited American settlers to fortify their borderlands against the powerful threat of Indian tribes like the Comanches, Apaches, and Kiowas. Stephen Austin, for example, was offered the opportunity to relocate three hundred American families to Texas. By the time of Andrew Jackson's presidency, the initial "trickle" of American immigrants into Mexico had become a deluge.[10] In Texas, for example, about 1,000 Americans arrived per year between 1823 and 1830. In the 1830s this increased to about 3,000 annually, and in 1835 the Anglo-Texan and slave population outnumbered Mexican Texans 10 to 1.[11]

Life in the Mexican borderlands offered many American men chances for adventure, wealth, and entrepreneurship that seemed to be declining in the East. Furthermore, American men found an astonishingly open and inviting marriage market in the borderlands. Mexican society, they swiftly found, possessed a very similar racial hierarchy to their own, and many

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[7] *The New York Herald,* October 8, 1847.
[8] Omar Santiago Valerio-Jiménez, "'Indios bárbaros,' divorcées, and flocks of vampires: Identity and nation on the Rio Grande, 1789-1894" Ph. D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2001, 91—93.
[9] Ibid., 91—93. Anne Hyde, *Empire, Nations, and Families: A History of the North American West, 1800—1860* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 77, 158.
[10] DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts,* 4.
[11] Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 21, 22.

families who proudly identified themselves as "white" and "Spanish" (a claim that, following sections will detail, was often dubious) were eager to unite with Anglo-Americans. Such a union could preserve their purportedly pure bloodlines (an increasingly difficult task in isolated towns with small, racially-mixed populations) and presented Mexican families with advantageous ties to growing American wealth, trade, and influence. For American men, such marriages could bring extensive land (since by law Mexican sons and daughters inherited equal shares in their parents' estates), ties to wealthy, powerful Mexican kin, and the opportunity to become Mexican citizens and thus hold political office.[12]

The Mexican frontier was therefore exceedingly attractive to many American men because of the economic, political, and personal advantages it offered. Yet as Brian DeLay argues in *War of a Thousand Deserts*, it also appeared alluringly weak. The newly independent Mexican government lacked sufficient strength and organization to exercise much power over its northern frontier. In the 1830s and 40s, the absence of such authority was reflected in the devastation of the so-called "War of a Thousand Deserts," the name given to the series of Indian raids and conflicts that left villages in such ruins that whole swaths of the frontier were deserted. To many Americans, steeped in a racial ideology that equated whiteness with strength, authority, and civilization, the inability of the Mexican government to defend its frontier against *los indios bárbaros*—the savages—evidenced the weakness of a nation that, despite various claims to pure, "Spanish" descent, many Americans considered primarily composed of a "mongrel race." As the ideology of "manifest destiny" began to direct United States policy, many Americans began to think that only their own Anglo-Saxon vigor could sweep the region clean of the Indian menace and establish unassailable bastions of civilization.[13]

In 1836, American colonists in Texas rebelled against the Mexican government and succeeded in establishing the independent Lone Star Republic. In the Mexican-American War from 1846 to 1848, the American army penetrated all the way to Mexico City, obtaining the vast territories of Alta California and New Mexico—as well as the new Lone Star Republic—in the ensuing Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Only a few months after that, gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill, California, triggering a gold rush that lured tens of thousands of hopeful Americans West, as well as significant numbers of Spanish Americans North. Besides providing a meeting-ground for the residents of North, Central, and South America, the Gold Rush gave many Anglo-Americans their first opportunity to venture through countries like Mexico, Panama, and Nicaragua—or, if they were taking the long route around Cape Horn, through various parts of the South American coastline—on their way to the Californian mines. Many who failed to find gold in the new U.S. territory opted instead to seek their fortunes in Spanish America. By the 1850s, as historian Amy Greenberg writes in her examination of American imperialism in Spanish and other Latin American countries, it seemed "as though a fever for Latin America had infected the country."[14] Never before had the average North American been so aware of the region. Gold

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[12] AndrésReséndez explains that to become a Mexican citizen one had to be Catholic, to obtain a land grant one had to be a Mexican citizen, and to get married one had to be a Catholic. Marriage therefore emerged as a crucial step towards legitimation of economic activities and the establishment of social standing in Mexican territories. See Reséndez, *Changing National Identities*, 81.

[13] See DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*. For more on the failure of the Mexican government to fully control those areas, see David Weber *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press), 1982; For the quintessential work on the equation of Anglo-Saxonism with manifest destiny, see Horsman**,** *Race and Manifest Destiny.*

[14] Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood*, 55

rushers and settlers poured into the new American lands, often landing in Panama, Nicaragua, and Mexico en route. Businessmen and politicians poured money into shipping lines and railroads connecting the United States to various parts of Central America, and eagerly sought to recruit American investors and settlers. Some men even organized "filibustering" expeditions into Spanish American regions like Cuba, Sonora (in Mexico), and Nicaragua, assembling private, unauthorized armies with the intent to conquer a nation by force. William Walker's successful but brief take-over of Nicaragua in 1856 is one of the most famous examples of a thirst for Spanish American lands that superseded national loyalty and obedience.[15]

Whether the American invasion of Spanish American territory was economic or political, temporary or permanent, violent or peaceful, it was claimed by some as the next step in "manifest destiny's" unstoppable advance. North Americans tended to lump the peoples of these newly independent Spanish colonies together, since the nations possessed a similar colonial history, racial composition, social hierarchy, religion, and language, which appeared to translate into a general Spanish American culture. When writing of the various countries and peoples, then, North Americans rarely made distinctions; this chapter's designation "Spanish American" is therefore meant to encompass the various stereotypes that North Americans assigned to the Spanish-speaking regions of Mexico, Central and South America. Since the writers referred to themselves as "Americans," this chapter will also use this term to refer specifically to white citizens of the United States.

Travelogues, diaries, and letters entertained the American public with adventurous stories of the romantic lands; histories like William Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico* created gorgeous images of a fantastical, lost American civilization on par with ancient Rome; a booster literature published by those with political and financial interests in the region boasted of fertile lands and welcoming people. In fact, Greenberg claims that in the mid to late 1850s, "it would have been difficult to examine a selection of popular periodicals without finding a travelogue to the region."[16]

The theme that tied all of this literature together, as Greenberg demonstrates, was the allure of the Spanish American *señorita*. Almost every piece that mentioned the borderlands or Spanish America—whether a personal diary like Timothy's, a published travelogue, or a "booster" article—gushed over the beauty, warmth, and enticing sexuality of the region's women. While some of these writings were deprecating, complaining of the women's lack of modesty in their clothing, their dirtiness, promiscuity, or complete disregard for marital fidelity, the vast majority professed themselves enchanted by the ladies. Indeed, many writers who began with complaints about Spanish American women's revealing clothing or over-friendly embraces ended with admissions that such tendencies actually began to seem innocent, charming, and warm when one grew accustomed to them. Timothy's own diary, for example, ardently defended the Mexicans' "conduct between the sexes" by announcing that those Americans who complained of impropriety simply had "contracted ideas of . . .virtue."[17]

Even foreign periodicals noticed American men's tendency to praise Spanish American women. Of Ephraim George Squier, one of the most prolific authors of booster literature, the *London Literary Gazette* wrote "our American envoy's appreciation of female charms is so

[15] For a full analysis of Walker's expedition and the gendered nature of "filibustering," see Greenberg, Chapter Four, "William Walker and the Regeneration of American Manhood," in *Manifest Manhood.*
[16] Ibid., 55, 56.
[17] January 19, 1850, Timothy C. Osborn Journal.

intense, that he cannot pass a pretty woman without inscribing a memorandum respecting her in his notebook."[18] As Greenberg's work demonstrates, the portrayal of Spanish American lands as lush, fertile gardens populated by lovely women was vital to booster literature's goal of inviting American investment and settlement. In fact, the entire dialogue surrounding the U.S-Mexican conflict and "manifest destiny" itself was gendered. The *New York Herald,* for example, wrote in 1847 that "like the Sabine virgins, she [Mexico] will learn to love her ravisher." The *Philadelphia Public Ledger* declared that the best way to annex Mexico would be first to subdue it with military force, and then allow seduction to ensure assimilation. "Our Yankee young fellows and the pretty señoritas will do the rest of the annexation," the *Ledger* announced, "and Mexico will soon be Anglo-Saxonized, and prepared for the [United States] confederacy."[19]

Public and political debates about the annexation of Mexican territories often concerned themselves with the risks and rewards of a "marriage" between a feminine Mexico and a masculine America. Sam Houston wrote that a newly independent—but still ostensibly Mexican—Texas presented itself to the United States "as a bride adorned for her espousals," but President Zachary Taylor worried about the problems that might attend the "drag[ging of] California into the Union before her wedding garment has yet been cast about her person." The *Southern Quarterly Review* confessed its belief "that Mexico is now incapable of self-rule," and decided "that her only hope of salvation is in the government of some wise and virtuous ruler or junta, having the power to enforce domestic tranquility until the dawn of national resurrection."[20] The implication, of course, was that the United States was the perfect husband who, with a superior race, government, and civilization, could best care for the lovely yet inept feminine nation.[21]

Greenberg's explanation for such blatantly sexual language centers on the goals of "manifest destiny." Spanish American women, though not Anglo-Saxon (even when claiming to be European), were presented as beautiful, desirable, suitable partners for American men because their lands were. The women were attractive to politicians, businessmen, speculators and developers not only because they often possessed their own, personal wealth and property (due to Spanish inheritance laws), but because they also seemed to personify them. Spanish American lands, like the *señoritas* themselves, were perceived to be beautiful and fertile but tragically uncultivated, due primarily to the ineptitude and weakness of Spanish American men.[22]

While I certainly agree that these advantages allowed North American men to be far more publicly vocal about Spanish American women's charms than those of other, non-white women, and far more willing to act upon their desires by openly courting and marrying them, other factors were also at play. After all, men with no apparent interest in Spanish American territory

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[18] "Mr. Squier on Nicaragua," *London Literary Gazette,* quoted in *The International Magazine of Literature, Art and Science,* April 1852, 474-6.

[19] *New York Herald,* October 8, 1847; *Philadelphia Public Ledger,* Dec 11, 1847.

[20] Samuel Houston and President Taylor quoted in Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," *American Literature* 70, no. 3 (September 1998): 585; *Southern Quarterly Review,* October 1847, 373.

[21] On the subject of the gendered themes of imperialism, see: Streeby, *American Sensations;* Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Caren Caplan, Norma Alarcón, and Minoo Moallem, eds, *Between Women and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999). Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood.*

[22] Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood,* 29, and specifically Chapter Three, ""American Men Abroad: Sex and Violence in the Latin American Travelogue."

or wealth also admitted to cultivating certain fantasies about the *señoritas*. Fictional and travel literature about these women was so popular and prevalent that most Americans, realistically, would have simply read it for pleasure or titillation rather than any intention to visit or invest in the region. Others who did travel to the borderlands, like Timothy Osborn, seemed to express no pecuniary interest in Spanish America at all. With his sights set on California gold, Timothy never expressed a desire to find his fortune in the southern nations. He did fantasize specifically about a love affair with a "rich and accomplished" Mexican woman, but this simply seems to have been an aspect of the splendor he wished to experience in the fabled, "ancient capital of the Aztecs."[23] To Timothy, Mexico was, above all, the land of scintillating *señoritas* who held an allure that seems to have been both racial and cultural. It was rooted in particular notions surrounding the characteristics of a mixed-race population, as well as a mixed culture of feudal Spanish institutions and ancient Aztec traditions.

For many men, an adventure to the western frontier was motivated not only by a thirst for new lands and experiences, but also by disillusionment at the lack of opportunity in the East. For men like Timothy, this sense of frustration partly had to do with the lack of marital options. While Timothy initially told his diary of his intention to make money out West in order to fund a marriage with a woman back East, he ended up replacing white women with *señoritas* in his affections, and permanently settled in Stockton, California. Whether or not it was their initial intention, then, many American men who ventured to the frontier sought relations with Spanish American women. Moreover, while the number of trappers, traders, and other mountain-men who cultivated relations with Indian women in the early nineteenth century was relatively low, many more American men of all occupations and backgrounds entered Spanish American territory—or lands annexed from the region—from the 1820s to the Civil War. As evidenced by the travelogues, articles, and personal diaries this chapter will analyze, they arrived with specific ideas about the region's race, culture, and capacity for civilization that made Spanish American *señoritas* of all races appear the most attractive, respectable, and advantageous option among western women—and possibly even more desirable than white American women themselves.

"*The deterioration attending this commingling of Spanish and Indian races is painfully apparent*"[24]

A Mongrel Race

Ostensibly, Mexico had a racial hierarchy similar to that of the United States. Under Spanish rule, race had been carefully recorded in census data, birth and marriage certificates, and even employment records. Even after independence, when the constitution officially abolished racial categories, race continued to be an intrinsic component and organizing principle of society, closely linked to social and economic status. Whites generally held professional, political or business positions, and those of mixed heritages generally performed manual labor ranging from artisanal work to farming. In general, the hierarchy placed whites of Spanish descent at the top, with *mestizos* (half white and half Indian) on the next level, *mulattos* (half white and half black) below that, and pure-blooded Indians and blacks at the very bottom. In the colonial period, individuals needed to apply for a *probanza de limpieza de sangre*—a document certifying their

[23] November 28, 1850, Timothy C. Osborn Journal.
[24] Morris Myers and Philip Van Ness, *Life and Nature under the Tropics; Or, Sketches of Travels Among the Andes, and on the Orinoco, Rio Negro, and Amazons* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1871), 232.

purity of white blood—to hold various political, military, and ecclesiastical positions. Families of Spanish origin so jealously guarded their racial purity that some even began to require marital suitors to provide *probanzas* before courting.[25]

The reality of Mexican society, however, was far different than such evidence suggests. From the earliest years of Spanish domination, the *conquistadors* actively sought marriages with native women, preferably those of noble or royal descent, lest their numbers die out as a result of the absence of Spanish women. Throughout the colonial period and after independence, racial categories grew so complex that simple designations like "mestizo" and "mulatto" became insufficient. In both official documents and colloquial speech, new categories specifying ever more permutations of blood mixture proliferated: *zambos* were part Indian and part black, *moriscos* were part *mulatto* and part Spanish, *castizos* were part *mestizo* and part Spanish. Even skin color itself became increasingly specific: there were "white mulattos" and "black mulattos" and even "wolf mulattos," who were the "dark mulattos" of Indian and "black mulatto" parents.[26] With racial mixing so common, it became increasingly easy for members of a particular caste within the racial hierarchy to "pass" into the one—or several—above it. As María Elena Martínez demonstrates in her work *Genealogical Fictions,* people of mixed heritage were increasingly able to apply for *probanzas de limpieza de sangre* despite the reality of their bloodlines—if, that is, they were able to convince authorities of their superiority based on other factors like economic success or social standing. Historian Patricia Seed holds that the caste system was actually remarkably fluid; she cites marriage and census records that reflect individuals' blatant attempts to "pass" into different racial categories. A *castizo's* advantageous marriage to a white woman, for example, might be reflected in a marriage record that contradicted his birth record, listing him as "white." In his analysis of census data, John Chance theorizes that the apparent decline of the numbers of *mestizos* in Mexico during the eighteenth century can be explained not as the result of decreasing miscegenation, but of the success of various mixed-race Mexicans at "passing" into white society.[27]

A number of events could vault a Mexican of mixed heritage to social whiteness: an advantageous marriage, a successful and lucrative career, a powerful leadership position, or, perhaps simplest of all, a move to the Mexican frontier. Mexicans visualized their northern frontier similarly to the way Americans did their western: it was a wild land populated by barbarous Indians who, along with the land itself, needed to be civilized. In colonial times the Crown offered generous terms to settlers of any race or class who were willing to brave the stark, dangerous northern lands and serve as models of civilization. Settlers were given financial subsidies, loans of tools and animals, tax exemptions, and even land grants. Most importantly,

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[25] The most comprehensive discussion of the *probanzas* can be found in Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions.*

[26] Colin Palmer, *Slaves of the White God: Blacks in Mexico, 1570-1650* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 41.

[27] Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions;* Patricia Seed, "The Social Dimensions of Race;" John Chance, "On the Mexican Mestizo," *Latin American Research Review* (1979): 153—168. For more on the phenomenon of "passing" in Mexico, see Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets,* and Douglas Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660-1720* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994). Cope's argument is actually the opposite of the other Latin American historians here listed, as he holds that "passing" was utilized relatively rarely by the lower classes to improve their social standing. Nonetheless, considering my focus on both the nineteenth century and the northern frontier (Cope focuses on Mexico City in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), I find the other scholarly arguments in favor of the social mobility of "passing" to be more relevant to my project.

however, a move to the frontier offered non-white Mexicans a chance to improve their social station and "pass" into white society. For example, while *mestizos* and *mulattos* were forbidden to fight in the all-white, Spanish army in Mexico, they were nonetheless allowed to fight in the frontier forces against tribes like the Comanche, Apache, and Kiowa.[28]

In her work *Thread of Blood*, Ana María Alonso explains that the hierarchy of color was far more fluid on the frontier than in central and southern Mexico. In the North, status was based on proof of personal honor and fighting skills, creating what she terms a "frontier egalitarianism" that permitted non-whites a means of accumulating economic and social capital beyond the limits of their racial caste. While other parts of Mexico almost obsessively sub-divided racial groups according to color and heritage, Alonso explains that the Mexican frontier possessed only two, main groups: Indians and Mexicans or, as the settlers termed them, "*indios*" and "*no indios*." Mexicans, or "*no indios"* also identified themselves as "*gente de razón"*—"people of reason"—to distinguish themselves from the uncivilized, irrational Indians. Even settlers with black or Indian ancestors could classify themselves as "*gente de razón*"—which also carried the subtle connotation "white"—if they upheld a civilized life.[29]

Such social fluidity meant that one could never be entirely sure of the racial purity of families on the Mexican frontier—even those who claimed to trace their bloodlines straight back to Spain. Americans were therefore very dubious about the racial claims of Mexicans and other Spanish Americans with whom they came into contact. How did such a mixed heritage operate within the North American racial hierarchy? A huge population of mixed-race people existed in the American South, but laws, social norms, and the institution of slavery itself generally kept them securely bound in an inferior caste. In the American West, the children of white and Indian unions were generally spurned as untrustworthy "half-breeds," relegated to the roles of guides, interpreters, or other frontier positions, and similarly believed to be unthreatening to the social order. Spanish Americans, on the other hand, were an impossibly complicated blend of Indian, black, and European heritage who, despite their claim of a racial caste system, clearly allowed an alarming degree of flexibility and social fluidity. In the nineteenth-century American mindset, were Spanish Americans therefore superior or inferior to North American Indians and blacks? Was even their Spanish blood suspect when held up to pure, Anglo-Saxon lineage?

Alexander Kinmont, a Scottish intellectual immigrant, explained in one of his influential lectures that there was certainly a *psychological* connection between blacks and Spanish Americans. Ironically, since the latter classified themselves as "*gente de razón"* in comparison to Indians, Kinmont argued that Spanish Americans were just as degraded and barbaric as the other non-white races. Both Spanish Americans and blacks, he explained, based their actions on feelings rather than reason, were licentious, and possessed "a sensual effeminacy."[30] Many Spanish Americans, furthermore, possessed a lineage extending all the way back to African

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[28] For more on Mexican frontier ideology and policy see, DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts;* Alonso, *Thread of Blood*; Michael González, *This Small City Will be a Mexican Paradise: Exploring the Origins of Mexican Culture in Los Angeles, 1821—1846* (Albuquerque. University of New Mexico Press, 2005).

[29] Alonso, *Thread of Blood,* 67 , and specifically chapters one and two. Michael González presents the interesting example of Los Angeles as a city created specifically to be a "bastion" against the wilderness. It was built be beautiful and orderly, with a wall to divide it from the surrounding "wilderness." Angelenos devoted themselves to a culture of restraint, punctuality, temperance, diligence, and courtly airs that was intended to distinguish them from the perceived laziness, disease, alcoholism and low manners that supposedly characterized Indians. González, *This Small City Will be a Mexican Paradise*.

[30] Kinmont, *Twelve Lectures,* 289-290.

slaves, who had been shipped by the Spaniards to work in plantations, ranches, mines and towns until abolition in 1810. The Spanish colonies' reliance on African slave labor was relatively short-lived, but African people were sufficiently widespread—and, despite certain attempts to curtail fraternization, engaged in sufficient interracial unions—to give many North Americans concern about the imprint of their legacy on Spanish American bloodlines.[31] Nonetheless, most felt that even the darkest Spanish Americans were superior to Africans. Many travelogues commented on their similar appearances, but asserted a preference for the former's conduct, form, intellect, and even odor. In his journal, J.A Clark wrote that in Panama he was "crowded by Natives, . . . some of whose faces were as black as ebony, but there was nothing of that offensive odor that accompanies a Negro, thus showing a different race from the negro, although black." Remarking on the Mexicans he saw on his travels to California, William McCollum wrote that the natives were "nearly as black as African negroes, but better formed. . . . [T]he features were far more regular than those that characterize that race in our country."[32]

Much of this was felt to be due to the fact that the majority of racial mixing in Spanish America had occurred between whites and Indians. According to historian Frederick Pike, nineteenth-century North Americans saw Spanish Americans in much the same way as they saw their "own" Indians, and often referenced mutual lineages.[33] Nonetheless, there was a sense among North Americans that the Indians of the southern countries were actually superior, since they were the descendants of the great empires of the Aztecs, Mayans, and Incas. According to Robert Johannsen in his work *To the Halls of the Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination,* the ruins and legends of these civilizations gave nineteenth-century Americans the sense of an authentic, ancient world equivalent to classical Greece or Rome. William Hickling Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico,* which greatly romanticized Aztec civilization, was published in 1843, right at the cusp of a rapidly growing interest in Mexican territories that would erupt in a war a few years later. The popularity of Prescott's book grew exponentially in that period; countless accounts from travelers and, especially, soldiers, cited it reverently, and many admitted that it was primarily responsible for kindling their interest in the area.[34]

Prescott's work likened the Aztecs to the ancient Egyptians, Romans, and "Hindoos," asserting that they were "far surpassing in intelligence that of the other North American races." Calling Tenochtitlàn the "Venice of the New World," Prescott detailed an Aztec society and culture that sounded suspiciously similar to that of Victorian America. He asserted that, in Aztec law, intemperance was severely punished, marriage was a sacred vow, and divorce was rare. As for "domestic life," Prescott assured readers that the "ferocious Aztec" there displayed a "cultivated nature." An Aztec maiden was delicately raised by her parents, counseled "to preserve simplicity in her manners and conversation, uniform neatness in her attire, . . . [and]

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[31] For more on the history of African slavery in Mexico, the types of labor they performed, their place in society, and the laws against interracial mixing, see Palmer, *Slaves of the White God,* and Nicole Von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers: Confraternities and Social Mobility for Afro-Mexicans* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006).

[32] Journal of J.A. Clarke, April 5, 1852, quoted in Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood,* 95.William McCollum *California as I Saw It: Pencillings by the Way of its Gold and Gold Diggers!* ed., Dale L. Morgan (Los Gatos, CA: Talisman Press, 1960), 88, 89.

[33] Pike, Chapter Three, "Latin Americans and Indians: Ambiguous Perceptions of an Alleged Connection," in *The United States and Latin America.*

[34] Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas,* 30, 69, 179.

strict attention to personal cleanliness." Aztec parents "inculcated modesty as the great ornament of a woman, and implicit reverence for her husband."[35] How Prescott could have known such intimate details about Aztec society is a question that deserves skeptical debate, but he clearly seemed to understand what his readers wished to hear. Aztec maidens, apparently, did not possess the same "vices" as North American Indian women.[36]

The allure of Old World, aristocratic Spanish traditions, combined with splendid, almost supernatural Aztec elements, lent Mexico the flavor of a fantasy land in many readers' imaginations. "Mexico! Land of romance and boyhood's waking dreams!" one volunteer in Taylor's army exclaimed in his journal, and another called Mexico "a fabled land, . . . almost an earthly paradise." Aztec maidens populated many an imaginative soldier's daydreams. One became enamored with a ruined palace where he imagined "blushing beauty has listened to the amorous tale breathed in her ear by her warrior lover." Another idealized the castle of Chapultepec as the spot where the "irresolute Montzeuma" held forth "and Indian maidens wove their garlands of flowers . . . to deck the brows of the successful braves."[37] To be attracted to the descendant of an *Aztec* Indian maiden, then, was in many ways more acceptable than attraction to a North American "squaw."

On the frontier, marriage to a Mexican woman was seen to be a significant step up from a union with an American Indian. Many accounts from trappers, traders, and fur company officials mention that white men often abandoned their Indian wives when they found young Mexican women—preferably those with ties to wealthy Mexican families. Kit Carson, for example, married fifteen-year old Josefa Jaramillo of Taos as his third and last wife, after the Arapaho Singing Grass and the Cheyenne Making-Out-Road. Another trapper took his Sioux wife and Indian children to the Mexican village of San Geronimo, where he met thirteen year-old Elena Mendoza and swiftly married her in the local church. His Indian wife simply piled her possessions on a horse and walked the long miles back to her tribe.[38] In his account *Life in the Far West,* George Ruxton—a British explorer who spent many years traveling and living on the American frontier—recalled that "refined trappers" who were weary of the bachelor life were inclined to "undertake an expedition into the settlements of New Mexico," where they were known to "carry off, . . . from the midst of a fandango . . . , some dark-skinned beauty—with or without her consent."[39]

The major advantage, it seems, were the supposed drops of white blood a Spanish American possessed, which were also attributed to the notion that the southern nations were more civilized and advanced than Indian or African tribes. The claim that, centuries before, much of the royal and noble blood of the highest native families had mixed with the white, European blood of the *conquistadors* nudged the Spanish American race quite significantly higher up the American racial hierarchy than either Indians or blacks, even those of mixed race. Nonetheless, many Americans did not consider the Spanish to be a true white race at all. William Watts Hart Davis, a prolific travel writer and the U.S. Attorney for New Mexico, explained that the Spaniards were mixed-race themselves, having intermarried with the dark Moors for many

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[35] Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 3, 17, 21, 37, 151.
[36] A path-breaking work on this subject is Louis Daniel Segal's dissertation, "Images of Conquest in Imaginative Nineteenth-Century North American Literature: Mexico and Peru," University of California, Davis, 1997.
[37] Soldiers quoted in Ibid., 83, 146.
[38] Lecompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn,* 66. For more on Kit Carson, see Simmons, *Kit Carson and His Three Wives.*
[39] Ruxton, *Life in the Far West,* 131-132

centuries prior to the latter's expulsion in the fifteenth century. Spain, Davis said, was therefore contaminated by the vices that plagued most mixed-race societies, where "morals were never deemed an essential to respectability and good standing in society." It was therefore to be expected, he explained, that the Mexican descendants of the unions between the *conquistadors* and the natives would possess both the inferior, barbaric traits of the latter people and "the vices of those whose homes are washed by the blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea."[40] The Spanish were therefore thought to be a "dark" people among the white races, possessing many of the same qualities associated with non-white skin: irrationality, deceitfulness, violence, and lasciviousness. Presenting his evidence as one who was appointed by the U.S. Government as a kind of official go-between for the two nations, Davis summed up the Mexican people as a blend of three races that, though superior to blacks and American Indians in their construction of civilization, were nonetheless incapable of being truly civilized. "[Those] in whose veins flows the blood of three distinct races, . . . present a corresponding diversity of character," Davis asserted.

> They possess the cunning and deceit of the Indian, the politeness and spirit of revenge of the Spaniard, and the imaginative temperament and fiery impulses of the Moor. They have a great deal of what the world calls smartness and quickness of perception, but lack the stability of character and soundness of intellect that give such vast superiority to the Anglo-Saxon race over every other people. They have inherited a portion of the cruelty, bigotry, and superstition that have marked the character of the Spaniards from the earliest times.[41]

This kind of thinking characterized the majority of American views on Mexicans throughout the nineteenth century. Miscegenation, it was thought, had only exacerbated the worst qualities of each race. "The deterioration attending this commingling of Spanish and Indian races is painfully apparent," travelers Morris Myers and Philip Van Ness noted in their account *Life and Nature under the Tropics.* "We observe a loss of intellectual force, a union of the worst qualities of both, of which there is no lack in either, and an elimination of . . . a broad and vigorous manhood." Another traveler, C.S. Steward, assumed his readers' agreement when he wrote in his travelogue that the "almost unlimited extent of mixed blood" encountered in South America "cannot fail to be revolting" to "a visitor from . . . *our* country." In his book on California, Hubert Howe Bancroft labeled Mexicans "droves of mongrels" born of a "turgid racial stream" who were "physically, morally, [and] politically" weak. "To eat, to drink, to make love, to smoke, to dance, to ride, to sleep," he reported, "seemed the whole duty of man."[42]

The proliferation of these negative attitudes about the "mongrel" Spanish American race, just like the scientific dialogue surrounding miscegenation in the United States, was gender-specific. Just as the ideology analyzed in Chapter One claimed that miscegenation through the non-white female body could actually be ameliorative, so the discourse concerning mixed-race Spanish Americans asserted that *señoritas* were far superior to their men. Even Myers, Van

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[40] Davis, *El Gringo*, 214-215, 220-221, 231.
[41] Ibid., 217.
[42] Myers and Van Ness, *Life and Nature under the Tropics*, 232; C.S. Steward, *Brazil and La Plata: The Personal Record of a Cruise* (New York: G.P. Putnam & Co., 1856), 72. My italics. Hubert Howe Bancroft quoted in Antonia I. Castañeda, "Gender, Race, and Culture: Spanish-Mexican Women in the Historiography of Frontier California," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 11, no. 1, (1990): 10.

Ness, Steward and Bancroft specified that their talk of "revolting" characteristics centered on Spanish American men. When speaking of the race in general, writers usually meant "men." To emphasize this, many writers made a special point of excusing the *señoritas* from such generalizations, and explaining that they were the superior sex. "The men are generally indolent and addicted to many vices," Alfred Robinson complained in *Life in California,* "yet, . . . in few places of the world, . . . can be found more chastity, industrious habits and correct deportment among the women." "I can not remember to have observed one single commendable trait in the character of the Mexican," George Ruxton declared. Aware that he had fallen into the tendency of associating nationality with maleness, he went on to write that "this sweeping clause" was "always excepting . . . the women of the country, who, for kindness of heart and many sterling qualities, are an ornament to their sex, and to any nation." "A Mexican *doña* is always *a lady*," an article in the *Southern Quarterly Review* assured readers, "[But] it is not our privilege to say the same of the men, . . . [who are] selfish, false, reckless and idle."[43]

Not all travel writers so thoroughly praised Spanish American women. As will be seen in an analysis of the travelogues, many writers suspected the *señoritas* of promiscuity and a lax attitude toward both sex and marriage. Nonetheless, the vast majority proclaimed themselves utterly charmed, and almost all admitted their sexual attraction. Of course, some American men seemed to think of Spanish American women in a similar way to blacks or Indians: female vessels for excessive male passions that could simply be used and discarded. "Mexicans have no business in this country. I don't believe in them," a letter published in *The Stockton Times* insisted. "The men were made to be shot at, and the women were made for *our* purposes."[44] Many others, though, clearly saw such women as fit candidates for legitimate marriage—even when their skins may not have been the whitest.

Spanish American women offered American men an intriguing racial gamut that ran from white (or "Spanish") and primly aristocratic to dark, sensual, and licentious. Miscegenation in Spanish America had created a rainbow of looks, skin colors, and associated characters and sexualities. The fluidity of the racial hierarchy and the ambivalence of American views on Spanish Americans, moreover, created a means by which white, American men could contract legitimate, highly-regarded unions with Spanish American women. They could therefore be extremely open about their attraction to mixed-race *señoritas*. "I know not how or why, but there certainly is an irresistible charm, that floats like a mist around Spanish creoles," Lieutenant Henry Augustus Wise wrote in his popular travelogue *Los Gringos,* choosing euphemistic language to emphasize Mexican women's white blood. They had, he explained, "a style of fascination peculiarly their own" (supposedly meaning one that pure-blooded women lacked) "which renders them truly bewitching."[45]

White European and American men who contracted unions with Spanish American women were very much aware that the racial claims of the *señoritas* and their families might be dubious. Nonetheless, the liminal place they occupied in the racial and gender spectrum gave them just enough respectability—and pecuniary advantages—to be considered suitable partners.

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[43] Alfred Robinson, *Life in California,* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1846), 73; George F. Ruxton, *Adventures in Mexico and the Rocky Mountains* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1848), iv; B.M, "Mexico—Her People and Revolution," *Southern Quarterly Review,* October 1847, 371.

[44] Letter to the *Stockton Times,* April 6, 1850, quoted in Maythee Rojas, "Re-Membering Josefa: Reading the Mexican Female Body in California Gold Rush Chronicles," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 35, no. ½ (Spring - Summer, 2007): 126.

[45] Wise, *Los Gringos,* 29.

Fantasies of Old World glamour, royal and aristocratic blood, and majestic ancient empires combined with fantasies about the panoply of traits associated with the various drops of white, black, and Indian blood to produce an ideal of the Spanish American *señorita* that was irresistible to many American men, whether active travelers and writers or passive readers.

"Repudiating the Yankees, and swearing myself a full-blooded Californian."[46]

The Travel Literature

The first travelers to write in significant numbers about Spanish America and its women were the same trappers and traders who were contracting unions with the West's Native Americans. As previously noted, these men generally considered relations with a Spanish American woman to be a step up—if, that is, she possessed wealth and kin networks to rival an American Indian bride. Perhaps an initial interest in the women was kindled by these early accounts, but publications committed to detailing the *señoritas*' looks, activities, personalities, and sexual habits really began to flood the American literary market in the 1840s, as soldiers poured into the borderlands. The Mexican-American War created a small but intense literary phenomenon: soldiers' journals and letters were published in scores of periodicals and books, and many an ex-soldier—or simply an inspired reader—churned out romances that featured lush Mexican lands, rapacious Mexican bandits, scintillating Mexican *señoritas*, and intensely manly American soldiers. The publications continued after the war, as increasing numbers of curious and ambitious travelers, gold miners, businessmen and settlers swarmed into the new American territories and openly debated the possibility of annexing entire Spanish American nations.[47]

In the panoply of literature produced about the region in the 40s and 50s, Spanish America was variously a fantasy world, an Eden, an oppressed victim of tyranny, or a valuable, highly advertised commodity. Spanish American women most often paralleled their countries' depictions: they were varyingly bewitching Indian princesses or Spanish nobility, angels, damsels in distress, or wealthy, well-advertised marital partners. Such parallels highlighted the sex of the majority of travelers, writers, and, likely, readers. The majority of authors, moreover, were American, and wrote for an American audience. Although my own work will reference a few European authors, specifying "Anglo" when generalizing about writers of various, white backgrounds, their works repeated almost all the same themes as American accounts, and are virtually indistinguishable.

Men of all occupations, social statuses, and ages traveled into the borderlands and Spanish America. The subject of annexation was a hot political topic discussed everywhere from taverns to parlors, and the borderlands offered opportunities to everyone from wealthy businessmen and speculators to penniless migrants and miners. As Robert Johannsen shows in his analysis of the literature surrounding the Mexican-American War, many of the volunteers were college graduates, medical and law students, and other well-educated members of the middle and upper classes.[48] The forty-niners, moreover, included poor immigrants, respectable sons of the middle-class like Timothy Osborn, and wealthy businessmen who sought to establish mining companies. Nonetheless, the vast majority were young, American, and male. They were,

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[46] Ibid.,17, 55.
[47] Johannsen's *To the Halls of the Montezumas* presents the most comprehensive analytical work on these publications.
[48] Ibid., 149.

furthermore, stereotyped as part of the culture of "aggressive masculinity." After all, a man who actively sought to win his fortune by confronting the dangers and adventures of the wilderness would certainly seem to have a more martial mindset than a typical member of the "restrained" Victorian bourgeoisie. *Hutchings California Magazine* had its own theory about the type of American man who settled in California:, "[He] is a restless genius, . . . full of invention.

> He can, in a given time, build and burn up, and build again, more cities, blow up more steamboats, smash more railroad cars, and kill more men, women, and children, by *unavoidable accident,* than any other living man. . . . He can eat the fastest. . . . He can do the fastest walking. . . . He makes the most money, and loses it the quickest, and if he happens to take it into his head that his country isn't big enough to accommodate . . . the wants of 'future destiny,' he takes a trip to Mexico, says good morning marm, and if she don't return the compliment, why just takes California.[49]

To *Hutchings,* at least, a typical Californian was therefore a spontaneous, energetic, aggressive man with a voracious appetite. Many travelogue writers embraced this persona, advertising themselves as quintessential representations of "aggressive masculinity" who prioritized adventure, gambling, drinking, and sex. Lieutenant Henry Augustus Wise, whose various travel writings on Spanish America were extremely popular, discarded any pretense of virtuous, Victorian manhood. Instead, he donned the pseudonym "Harry Gringo" and reveled in descriptions of his raucous, booze-soaked, flirtatious adventures. His works, which appear to have been primarily popular among men, focused intently on descriptions of the coquetry and roguery of Spanish American women, with whom he admitted to continually falling in love.[50] Professing himself "fond of tobaccos and ladies," he wrote in *Los Gringos* that he spent his time in California showing off for the local ladies, busying himself "swearing love and sipping *dulces* with the brunettas; . . . drinking strong waters; . . . and end[ing] by repudiating the Yankees, and swearing myself a full-blooded Californian."[51] To Wise, it seems, the borderlands and Mexico itself were havens for those who subscribed to a lifestyle of "aggressive masculinity"—so much so that enough strong liquor and sensual *señoritas* could cause a man to renounce the restrictions of Victorian America entirely.

Of course, not all American western travel writers associated themselves with this kind of lifestyle or persona. Nonetheless, most appeared to find Spanish American women irresistible. Their descriptive language seems to combine all the most positive stereotypes of both quadroons and Pocahontas-like Indian women. Indeed, as previously illustrated in the Introduction, artistic depictions of all three racial types are often impossible to differentiate. In part, this simply reflects the usual characteristics ascribed to women of darker races, but it also appears to indicate

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[49] "The World in California," *Hutchings California Magazine,* March 1857, 386. The original quote has the word "built" instead of "build," but I chose to correct the error to avoid confusion.

[50] It is difficult to know who, exactly, was reading what types of literature in the antebellum period, but various sources suggest that Wise was particularly known to cater to a young, male audience. As evidenced by records from the New York Society Library, his topics—travel writing and maritime adventure stories—were particularly popular among male patrons. Indeed, his *Tales for the Marines* was one of the few books to be taken out exclusively by men. In 1891, another writer of a nautically-themed book named *Tales for the Marines* his childhood inspiration, "one of the delights of our boy colony." Zboray, "Reading Patterns in Antebellum America, 312; Capt. Charles King, ed., *By Land and Sea,* (Philadelphia: L.R. Hamersly & Co, 1891), 5.

[51] Wise, *Los Gringos,* 17, 55

American men's assumptions about the mixed black, white, and Indian blood that composed the Spanish American race. Unlike the men, whose mixed blood was thought to imbue only the worst traits of each race, Spanish American women were often perceived to possess all the most desirable aspects discussed in previous chapters: the voluptuous, glowing appearance of the whitest quadroons and Indians; the noble bearing and royal blood of aristocratic European and Indian ancestors; the doting submissiveness and obedience of black and Indian women to their master/lovers; the consuming love for white men that mirrored quadroons' commitments and Indian women's Pocahontas-like sacrifices; the passion and open sexuality of all dark races; and the respectability, piousness, and, often, wealth and social status of white women. Instead of being the product of a "mongrel race," then, Spanish American women were often presented as combinations of the beautiful quadroon/Indian princess/white aristocrat types.

"As tastes differ, so many opinions as to . . . the novel contrasts that the 'bello sexo' affords in this glorious land of the sun."[52]

Appearance

"I could almost say that to see her is to love her," travelogue writer Albert M. Gilliam declared of Mexican women.[53] It wasn't just the glow of their skin, the bewitching twinkles in their dark eyes, or their undulating curves and tiny feet. Mexican women were also reportedly blessed with a charm that shone as warmly and invitingly as the sunshine of their native climate.[54]

Brantz Mayer, secretary of the U.S legislation to Mexico in 1841 and 1842, professed himself bemused by his own attraction, as he was well aware that Mexican women did not fit into the usual prototype of white, delicate female beauty. "To confess the truth," he wrote in his published memoir, " I cannot say that they are beautiful according to our ideas of beauty in the United States." They were not, he explained, white and "rosy" in their complexion, and there was "not much regularity of features" or "rose-bud lips." But, "be they fair or dark," there was "something in Mexican women" that "bewitches while you look at them." Perhaps it was their "universal expression of sweetness and confiding gentleness," or their "large, magnificent eyes where the very soul of tenderness seems to dwell." The remarkable thing about Mexican women, Mayer noted, was that despite their questionable racial origins and the dark hues of their skin, they presented themselves with an almost aristocratic grace and elegance. "Their gait is slow, stately, majestic," he explained, so that even "the commonest woman . . . struts a queen."[55]

Somehow, a Mexican woman managed to combine a queenly poise with a warm, inviting, and sometimes quite sexual attitude. Mayer raptly described the "special language" of the ladies' ubiquitous fans: "They touch them to their lips—flirt them wide open—close them—let their bright eyes peep over the rim, . . . and, in fact, carry on a warfare of graceful coquetry from behind these pasteboard fortresses, that has forced, ere now, many a stout heart to cry for

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[52] E.G. Squier, "Adventures and Observations in Nicaragua," *The International Magazine of Literature, Art, and Science,* July 1851, 438

[53] Albert M. Gilliam, *Travels over the Table Lands and Cordilleras of Mexico, During the Years 1843 and 44* (Philadelphia: J.W. Moore, 1846), 134.

[54] Whenever Mexican women's warmth and affection was mentioned, it was very often attributed to their residence in warm lands.

[55] Brantz Mayer, *Mexico as it was and as it is* (New York: J. Winchester, New World Press, 1844), 52-53.

quarter!"[56] Mexican women therefore managed to somehow appear "magnificent" when not typically beautiful, "queenly" though of a low social status, and adorably "coquettish" without seeming lascivious. It was no wonder, then, that so many a "stout" male heart "cried for quarter!"

Many writers attempted to euphemize the description of Spanish American women's skin in the same way they did quadroon and Indian women they admired. The *señoritas*, writers explained, represented an entire *rainbow* of colors, allowing men to select their preference from a broad spectrum. Davis made a point of specifying "women of all colors" when writing about Mexico's people, from "the fair skin of pure Spanish blood to a good wholesome Indian brown," and Ruxton professed wonder at the two Mexican daughters of an inn he stayed at, "one fair as Jenny Lind, the other dark as Kephtha's daughter, and both very pretty."[57] In Spanish America, the startling contrast of light and dark that so titillated American readers when they encountered it in the United States (especially when the two girls were friends or family) was a common feature of almost every region and a good number of households. Instead of professing disgust, Anglo writers often appeared enchanted with this racial rainbow, stating quite bluntly that it allowed a man to pick and choose his color preferences like an artist with a palette.

As with their descriptions of mixed-race black and Indian women, American and European writers often compared Spanish American women's skin color to flowers, fruits, and various other symbols that connoted ripeness, fertility, and pleasurable perfumes or flavors. They wrote of "nut browns," "conserves of cream and roses," "carnation richness," and "peach-like blooms."[58] Almost invariably, writers mentioned the lovely, light tinge an influx of "*sangre azul*," or "the blue blood of Old Castile" added to those dusky complexions, but they nonetheless seemed far more fascinated by the effect of mixed blood than pure.[59] One of the most prolific and popular of all American travel writers, E.G. Squier, wrote in *The International Magazine of Literature, Art, and Science* that he simply couldn't decide which end of the racial spectrum he found more beautiful. "As tastes differ," he explained, "so [do] many opinions" about female beauty—specifically, *racial* beauty. On the one hand, he wrote, there was that "tinge of brown, through which the blood glows with a peach-like bloom," in the complexion of a mixed-race girl "who may trace her lineage to the Caziques upon one side, and the haughty grandees of Andalusia and Seville." On the other, there was also the "fair and more languid Señora, whose white and almost transparent skin bespeaks a purer ancestry." But, Squier mused, was there "not a more real beauty" in the *mestiza*, "a greater lightness of figure and animation of face"? And then, he reminded the reader, "the Indian girl [must not] be overlooked," with "her full, lithe figure, long, glossy hair, quick and mischievous eyes, who walks erect as a grenadier beneath her heavy water-jar, and salutes you in a musical, impudent voice." Truly, Squier celebrated, one could revel in the "novel contrasts that the 'bello sexo' affords in this glorious land of the sun."[60] His readers certainly seemed to agree; not only were Squier's female-focused accounts some of

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[56] Ibid., 53.
[57] Davis, *El Gringo*, 281; Ruxton, *Travels in Mexico*, 38.
[58] Peter Stout, *Nicaragua: Past, Present, and Future* (Philadelphia: John E. Potter, 1859), 34; "Visit to the Guajiquero Indians," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, February 1860, 310; Squier, "Adventures and Observations in Nicaragua," 438.
[59] Ruxton, *Travels in Mexico*, 38.
[60] Squier, "Adventures and Observations in Nicaragua," 438.

the most popular of the time period, but his most oft-cited quotes concerned the veritable racial rainbow of female beauty he encountered. [61]

To Brantz Mayer, Mexican women's dark skin was not an index to their inferior racial status, but rather a hint of the "riches" such a woman possessed. "Sallow or dark" though her complexion may be, it is "yet no more than," he quoted poetically, "'The embrowning of the fruit that tells/How rich within the soul of sweetness dwells.'"[62] Of course, the comparison of Mexican women to ripe, delicious fruit suggests that the "richness" within was something slightly more than "sweetness."

Other writers professed to glimpse this same kind of inner passion and warmth through Spanish American women's eyes. Just as with quadroon and Indian women, Anglo men seemed fascinated by large, dark eyes that were felt to hold some hidden, thrilling depths. They were constantly described with words connoting warmth and fire: "brilliant yet languishing," "dark and lustrous, . . . like their native clime, always beaming with sunshine," or "burn[ing]" and "flash[ing]" with "languid, lightning glances."[63] Furthermore, the women were apparently capable of a kind of sexual hypnosis that transferred the heat of their passion into the bodies of men who glanced into their eyes. "*Ati purissima!*" Wise wrote in exuberant italics when describing the "lightning glances" that "flashed" from the ladies' eyes, "the waking hours by day, and sleepless ones by night, that Spanish maidens have caused me!"[64] Ruxton, too, wrote that a man's gaze became "concentrated" in the "large, lustrous eyes" of the Mexican ladies, "which, when you get within their reach, swallow you up as the sun swallows a comet when he is rash enough to approach too near, throwing you out again, a burned-up cinder, to be resuscitated and reburned by the next eyes which pass."[65] According to many Anglo men, then, attraction to Spanish American women was simply impossible to deny; their hot passions were intoxicating and enveloping. Such a transfer of agency onto the women allowed these men an excuse for their interracial desires. Like the victims of Medusa's gaze, they could claim a bewitched attraction beyond their own control.

Spanish American women's inherent sensuality was also thought to be discernible in the luxurious fullness of their figures. Like the lack of corsetry among Indians, Spanish American women's liberating clothing initially shocked many Anglo writers, but they soon acknowledged the beauty of natural curves. George Kendall, the founder of the New Orleans *Picayune*, wrote a very popular account of his capture by Mexicans on the Santa Fe Trail.[66] A recurring, favorite theme was the celebration of Mexican women's manifold virtues, which Kendall vehemently defended against Victorian strictures. He wrote that Mexican women dressed with "*abandon*" (suggesting both carelessness and lasciviousness), but claimed that their forms "obtain[ed] a roundness, a fullness, which the divinity of tight lacing never allows her votaries."[67] Authors rarely missed an opportunity to comment specifically on the women's busts, which they found

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[61] Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood*, 119.
[62] Mayer, *Mexico as it was and as it is*, 52-53.
[63] Kendall, *Narrative of the Santa Fé Expedition,* 1: 317; John Letts, *A Pictorial View of California,* (New York: Henry Bill, 1853), 148; Ruxton, *Travels in Mexico*, 21, Wise, *Los Gringos,* 208.
[64] Wise, *Los Gringos,* 208.
[65] Ruxton, *Travels in Mexico*, 21.
[66] First published in *The Picayune* as a series of correspondences, the adventure was so popular that it was soon published in a two-volume set which sold 40,000 copies. See Noel Loomis, *The Texan-Santa Fe Pioneers* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), x.
[67] Kendall, *Narrative of the Texan Santa Fe Expedition,* 1: 318-319.

both particularly large and marvelously uncovered. Kendall wrote of the tantalizing "sink" and "swell" of Mexican women's curves, and a soldier from Indiana wrote appreciatively that "their bosoms, . . .[un]compressed in stays, . . . heaved freely."[68] To the young soldier, it seems, Mexican women's breasts had an energetic life of their own, bouncing unrestrainedly in a way that suggested a similarly lusty, unbound sexuality. After all, the women were reportedly unashamed to allow admiring men free glimpses of their lovely bosoms. William Perkins claimed that, in California, Spanish American women flirted "by the apparently accidental disarrangement" of their shawls, offering "casual glimpses of a swelling bust." Waddy Thompson, the United States Envoy and Minister to Mexico from 1842 to 1844, declared that Mexican women were "brought up with an idea that the temptation of opportunity is one which is never resisted. . . . [I]f you meet a woman with a fine bust, which they are very apt to have, she finds some occasion to adjust her rebozo, and throws it open for a second."[69] Thompson thus attributed a similar lustiness to Spanish American women to that associated with white men. Unlike white women, to whom sex was supposed to be unknown or undesired, Mexican women apparently found sexual advances a "temptation of opportunity" they consciously invited.

While Indian women's lack of corsetry was usually seen as a consequence of total innocence, writers suggested that Spanish American women were completely conscious of their voluptuousness, and merrily willing to ensnare admirers with the careful play of fiery glances and displaced clothing. Yet most Anglo men seemed loath to deride these women as lascivious. George Kendall explained that, at first, "the Anglo-Saxon traveller" in Mexico is shocked by the "Eve-like and scanty garments of the females he meets," and wonders at their "indelicacy" and "brazen impudence." But Kendall quickly exonerated the women of any charge of "immodesty" by explaining that a traveler (whom he specifically labels "he") "soon learns that it is the custom and fashion of the country." Indeed, "he" soon comes "to the honest conclusion" that such dress "is really graceful, easy—ay, becoming," and "next wonders how the females of his native land can press and confine, can twist and contort themselves all out of proportion." The traveler therefore "looks around him, he compares, he deliberates—the result is altogether in favour of his new-found friends."[70] Such a statement is quite radical. To Kendall, Mexican women were far from indecent and promiscuous. Their sensuousness was, instead, presented as even lovelier and more desirable than the restraint of the tightly-laced Anglo-Saxon ladies of America and Europe. Moreover, by assigning the general traveler a male pronoun, Kendall assumed that all Anglo men shared his admiration of Mexican women.

Perhaps another reason attractive Spanish American women were allowed to get away with such blatant displays of sexuality was that they were repeatedly described as being exceptionally young. They were often described as having just emerged from an early puberty around the age of fourteen or fifteen.[71] Authors insisted that Spanish American girls sexually

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[68] Ibid., 1: 319; Soldier quoted in Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas*, 169.

[69] Perkins, *Three Years in California*, 29; Waddy Thompson, *Recollections of Mexico* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1846), 164-165.

[70] Kendall, *Narrative of the Santa Fé Expedition*, 1: 318.

[71] I specify "early" because, in the nineteenth century, women in Europe and the United States generally entered puberty at a much later date than in twentieth and twenty-first-century America. It is possible that Spanish American women, on average, really did tend to hit puberty at an earlier age than women in the United States, and that the fact was thus noticeably apparent to American men for reasons other than sexual desire. For the most comprehensive history of the ideas and practices surrounding menstruation in America, see: Lara Friedenfelds, *The Modern Period: Menstruation in Twentieth-Century Americ*a (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

matured far faster than those in the continent's northern reaches, and were careful to point out all the ways even the youngest teenagers had developed full, voluptuous figures. Nonetheless, it seems that Anglo men were titillated by this combination of innocence and sexuality, suggestively writing of newly "ripened" passion and "blossoming" desire. An article in *The Atlantic Monthly* entitled "Hunting a Pass: A Sketch of Tropical Adventure" described the enchanting transformation of a "doe-eyed child of easy confidences into a . . . girl, full in figure, with a glance which sometimes betrayed the glow of latent, but as yet unconscious passion." The correspondent exclaimed that, "in these sunny climes the bud blossoms and the young fruit ripens in a single day." George Kendall admitted that the most beautiful girl he had ever seen, a poor Mexican who stood by the side of the road, "could not be more than fifteen." But, he explained, she already had "a bust of surpassing beauty and loveliness," which "plainly disclosed that she was just entering womanhood. Her figure was faultless."[72]

Marriage records from New Mexico show that girls tended to marry very young: between 1694 and 1846, one out of four was married by the age of fifteen, and 80% by the age of twenty, while men were usually far older.[73] Such an emphasis on the early development of women therefore seems to have been a native cultural phenomenon, but American men appear to have found it advantageous. Many continued the tradition, marrying girls at exceptionally young ages. Kit Carson, for example, married his third wife when she was only fifteen and he was thirty-three.[74] Perhaps the desire was linked to certain racial stereotypes: if Spanish American women were supposed to be more inherently sexual than white women, it was advantageous to marry them before they acted on their own carnal desires. Perhaps another part of the attraction was the expectation that a very young girl would be an especially tractable, docile wife. After all, almost every American account agreed that Spanish American women were particularly warm, loving, submissive, domestic and obedient—as well as perpetually besotted with the American men they met.

"In the great attributes of the heart, affection, kindness, and benevolence in all their forms, they have no superiors."[75]

Character

In fiction, especially, and in some travelogues, quadroon and Indian women were sometimes depicted as rather tragic and melancholy. After all, Americans were aware of their oppression by the forces of slavery and westward imperialism. Yet Spanish American women were almost invariably described as being vivacious and joyful, even to those who were supposed to be their wartime enemies. Such depictions suggested that the entire female population of the country was practically begging for the arrival of American men with open arms and unbound bosoms.

Anglo men continually admitted—both subtly and bluntly—that Spanish American women were more affectionate, friendly, and adoring than the majority of Anglo women. "In the great attributes of the heart, affection, kindness, and benevolence in all their forms," the U.S

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[72] "Hunting a Pass: A Sketch of Tropical Adventure, Part 2," *The Atlantic Monthly,* April 1860, 449; Kendall, *Narrative of the Santa Fé Expedition,* 1: 383-384.
[73] Ramón Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 271-272.
[74] Simmons, *Kit Carson and His Three Wives,* 202.
[75] Thompson, *Recollections of Mexico,* 161.

Envoy to Mexico claimed, "they have no superiors." Their "inexhaustible spirits, . . . and their gentle affectionate manner," Robinson Warren agreed in his extensive travelogue *Dust and Foam,* made them "agreeable companions for anyone."[76] One of the reasons for their perpetual good spirits, some writers opined, was a simplicity and ignorance that was endearing rather than off-putting. Some historians have suggested that the growing numbers of educated, literate women, the popularity of female authors, and the fledgling woman's movement in the United States caused many American men to feel threatened.[77] In the South, where men held a greater measure of patriarchal power than in the North, it seems that a backlash against women's education occurred in the antebellum period. It was increasingly geared toward domestic training rather than classical subjects, and the emphasis on female education that had characterized the early republic's notion of "republican motherhood" had significantly waned by the 1830s.[78]

Perhaps the significant lack of formal education among Spanish American women was therefore seen by some men as an advantage rather than a failing. While a number of writers certainly disparaged the women's apparent lack of intellect, even more defended their perceived ignorance. William McCollum, an American physician and a forty-niner, argued in his 1850 travelogue that though Mexican women had "but little claim to all that education and improvement can effect," they nonetheless "bestow[ed] gifts of the heart as freely—and may we not say, even more spontaneously—than in the far more pretending and higher walks of life." He thus implicitly suggested that Spanish American women had a superior *emotional* intellect to over-cultivated, restrained Anglo women. Their ignorance, furthermore, was thought by some to ensure simple tastes and needs. "Among the lower orders, the women were invariably gifted with amiable dispositions," Wise informed his readers, "natural in manner, never peevish or petulant, requiring but little, and never happier than when moving night after night in the slow measure of their national dances."[79] Again, such a statement invited an implicit contrast with refined, expensive, and potentially demanding Anglo women of the higher classes.

Indeed, this portrait of a beautiful, childlike, sweet woman content to lavish affection and spend her life dancing may have pleased certain men who desired submissive, unthreatening women. Ruxton wrote that because "the Mexican ladies are totally uneducated," they were "in the presence of foreigners, conscious of their inferiority." As a result, they were appealingly shy and reserved. Nonetheless, Ruxton asserted, gradual intimacy made the women "vivacious, and unaffectedly pleasing in their manners and conversation," with "a warmth of heart and sympathy which wins for the women of Mexico the respect and esteem of all strangers."[80] To men like Ruxton, therefore, a "consciousness of inferiority" only made the women more attractive; it affirmed men's power and influence while ensuring warm, loving respect and admiration. A Spanish American woman, it seemed, always knew her place.

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[76] Ibid., 161; T. Robinson Warren, *Dust and Foam, or, Three Oceans and Two Continents* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1859), 199.

[77] Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood,* 7—8; See also Cott, *the Bonds of Womanhood,* especially Chapter Three, "Education," for a discussion of women's schools in New England.

[78] Anya Jabour, "'Grown Girls, Highly Cultivated': Female Education in an Antebellum Southern Family," *The Journal of Southern History* 64, no. 1 (February, 1998): 25. See also Jabour's footnote number 5 for her list of secondary source references on the subject of female education in the South. For a comparison of male and female school attendance in North and South, see Maris A. Vinovskis and Richard M. Bernard, "Beyond Catharine Beecher: Female Education in the Antebellum Period," *Signs* 3, no. 4 (Summer, 1978): 856-869.

[79] McCollum, *California As I Saw It,* 90. Original underline. Wise, *Los Gringos,* 148.

[80] Ruxton, *Travels in Mexico,* 56-57.

Like quadroon and Indian woman, a Spanish American *señorita* was also stereotyped as considering her "place" to be one of service, catering tirelessly to the needs of her husband and family so that she seemed, to some onlookers, to be a "drudge" or a "slave." Furthermore, much of Spanish American women's labor—unlike that of respectable Anglo women—appeared to be quite public: they washed clothes, ran errands, and even sold their own crafts and produce in markets and other communal areas. Like Indian men, Spanish American males were thought to be lazy and tyrannical, forcing extreme amounts of labor on women who were so dutiful that they cheerfully undertook the most grueling tasks. Such a depiction simultaneously stripped the men of masculine chivalry and ability, and suggested that the oppressed—but eminently able—women needed the guidance of true, capable Anglo-Saxon manhood. As with American Indian women, Anglo men alternated in their depictions of Spanish American women as domestic goddesses or drudges. On the one hand, such hard work and obvious domestic skill fit neatly into Protestant, Victorian culture; on the other, it sometimes seemed to smack of oppression.

Part of Spanish American women's apparent commitment to domestic "drudgework" was cultural. As Silvia Arrom explains in *The Women of Mexico City*, Mexican culture had its own version of the so-called "cult of true womanhood:" "*maríanismo*." While a culture of *machismo* dictated the proper habits and traits of masculinity, *maríanismo* held that women should be domestic and submissive, utterly dedicated to marriage and motherhood. Catholic ideology lay at the core of *maríanismo*, presenting the long-suffering, self-sacrificing, supremely virtuous Virgin Mary as the epitome of femininity. One Mexican contemporary held that the perfect wife "dedicated herself entirely to pleasing her husband, . . . recognizing at the same time his superiority and her necessary dependence on him." She was to act more like his child than his partner. The ideal wife "never asked where he was going or whence he came; neither did she attempt to discover his secrets or keep track of the money he earned; even less did she oppose his wishes in anything, or dissipate in luxury and fashion the sweat of his brow."[81] Arrom explains that this description was intended as part of a reformist tract; while it therefore did not indicate general, contemporary behavior, it nonetheless presented a masculine ideal of Mexican femininity. Furthermore, Mexican women, like their American counterparts, had few legal rights, and education was less emphasized than in the States.

Of course, the extent of a woman's domestic work depended in part on her social status; as in North America, the Spanish American upper classes expected most labor to be performed by servants.[82] Yet in Spanish American towns and cities, laboring women appeared to have been more prevalent and visible than in North America—or perhaps it was simply the fact that Americans were more accustomed to seeing slave or immigrant working women.[83] In Mexico

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[81] Jose Joaquin Fernandez Lizardi, quoted in Silvia Marina Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 2.

[82] I specify "servants" rather than slaves, since Spain outlawed slavery in all of its colonies (except Cuba, Santa Domingo, and Puerto Rico, which do not come under the scope of this analysis) in 1811.

[83] It is difficult to calculate the number of women workers in America, because so many engaged in various kinds of "invisible" work—for example, out-sourcing manufacturing work, or part-time domestic work—that meant they were not a particularly public or noticeable portion of the labor force, as they seem to have been in Spanish America. Nonetheless, the census of 1850 provides some data on women workers. In New York City, for example, 1/3 of the manufacturing force was made up of women. This statistic appears comparable to that of Mexico City, except that about 1/4 of the New York number outsourced their work, and 3/4 of the workers were immigrants. To many Americans, then, female public labor—such as factory work—seemed to be something primarily non-white or non-native. See Wilenz, *Chants Democratic*, 117—119.

City, for example, women made up at least one third of the work force in the early decades of the nineteenth century.[84] A correspondent for *Harper's Magazine* confessed to be completely charmed by the young *"mestizas*" at the marketplace. Instead of bemoaning their very public labor, he detailed the lush, refreshing, ripe qualities of their merchandize, dress, and even accents. "In very loose low-necked dresses of white calico," he wrote, conjuring the well-known image of an ample bosom "heaving" free of stays, they "sit behind their *serones* of fruit and vegetables, . . . blocks of cheese and *chancaca,* . . . bottles choked with *guarapo,* . . . and with accents as liquid and refreshing as the *guarapo*." Rather than stripping them of femininity, their work was undertaken with a "shy gracefulness" that made them "winsome little merchants."[85]

While many of the women seen at public work like laundering, tortilla-making, and vending were lower-class and therefore usually Indian or mixed-race, Anglo men often admitted an attraction to their labor, describing it in erotic, sensual language. One traveler explained that the pounding of maize in tortilla-making often required the women to bend far forward, exposing marvelous "busts," and another wrote that an additional step in the process required stamping on the corn with naked feet. Rather than exclaim in disgust, the writer dreamily admitted that "every time after when I ate a tortilla, I imagined I could see those beautiful clean feet."[86] Many Americans enjoyed watching Spanish American women carry loads of laundry, fruit, or other goods on their heads. If in the United States "the girls of more favored homes "were habituated to a daily exercise in this sort of *head-work*," a correspondent for *Harper's Monthly* wrote, "there would perhaps be fewer of the high shoulders, crooked backs, and puny legs so frequently met with in these degenerate days."[87] To this author, female labor actually contributed to healthier, more statuesque and feminine body types. Rather than reflect a low status, a masculine attitude, or promiscuity, then, Spanish American women's work was often seen to parallel their personalities: cheerful, charming, dutiful, clean, and sexual.

On the Mexican frontier, the population was sparse, survival depended on the labor of both sexes, and the upper classes had less recourse to servants. In frontier camps and towns, American and European men seemed particularly aware of the "drudgework" undertaken by Spanish American women—all while their men seemed blissfully idle. Perhaps Anglo men were hypersensitive because they, unlike Spanish Americans and Indians, were not usually accompanied West by their women. Americans and Europeans in mining camps, trading forts, and frontier settlements generally had to cook their own food, do their own laundry, and clean their own spaces—unless, that is, they took on an Indian or Spanish American wife, or paid black, Spanish American, or Chinese laborers to do it for them. Anglo writers were more likely to complain about the laziness of Spanish American men and the drudgery of their women when they happened to be in areas where they, themselves, had no women to do this work for them. While American and European frontiersmen prepared their own dinners, sewed up their own boots, and pitched their own tents, Spanish American men seemed only to lounge around the fire smoking, drinking, gambling, strumming guitars and singing.[88]

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[84] Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City,* 161.
[85] "Visit to the Guajiquero Indians," 310.
[86] Johnson, *Sights in the Gold Region,* and Parke, *Dreams to Dust,* quoted in Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood,* 131.
[87] Oran, "Tropical Journeyings," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine,* March 1858, 470-1.
[88] For more on homosocial frontier work, Chinese, black, and Spanish American launderers and laborers in the camps, and subsequent American perceptions of the women's "drudgework" and men's laziness, see Johnson, *Roaring Camp*.

One aspect of Spanish American culture that caused North American men to describe the women's marriages as "drudgery" and their lot as "slavish" was the apparent prevalence of domestic violence perpetrated by husbands. In the United States, of course, violence between domestic partners was also common—both with legitimate wives and with slave or servant mistresses.[89] Yet historians of Spanish America recognize that domestic abuse appears to have been more socially accepted in that region as an aspect of a *macho* culture, and had its roots in Spanish and church laws. The church taught that an ideal marriage was a hierarchy in which the husband was a benevolent ruler over his obedient wife. He was to be both "lord and slave:" lord in that he governed her, and slave in that he provided for her, esteemed her, and would sacrifice himself for her.[90] In Spanish colonial times, a man was permitted to kill an adulterous wife, though with qualifications. Colonial law allowed men to beat their wives in order to ensure obedience, and though these laws became more restrictive in the mid-nineteenth century, society still generally accepted a husband's right to physically discipline his wife. Silvia Arrom's analysis of nineteenth-century Mexican divorce petitions shows that a majority of women listed physical abuse as the primary cause of separation. The range of petitions also shows that domestic violence existed at every level of Mexican society.[91] In his work on bigamists in colonial Mexican society, Richard Boyer shows that the primary reason women left their first marriages was because of mistreatment, usually abuse and overwork. He argues that beatings were considered a natural part of a marriage, though there was certainly a difference between "correction," attacks with weapons, and "arbitrary" abuse. Nonetheless, because women were taught by their society that such domination was natural and necessary, many found the fine lines hard to draw.[92]

On the one hand, North Americans viewed this abuse as tyrannical, barbaric, and appalling. Frances Calderón de la Barca, a Scottish immigrant to America who married a Spanish aristocrat and lived with him in Mexico, wrote despairingly of the violence in her popular account *Life in Mexico*. One woman, she recounted, complained to a priest of "her husband's neglect, [and] mentioned as the crowning proof of his utter abandonment of her, that he had not given her a beating for a whole fortnight." To this woman, domestic violence was simply

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[89] The general outlook on domestic violence as something "monstrous" is shown in a Marital Advice column written for the periodical *American Farmer* in 1825. By that time, the "cult of true womanhood" had taken strong enough hold—at least among the self-proclaimed "respectable" classes—that domestic abuse, even when framed as "correction," was seen to be a violation of women's vaunted status. "There are a few other characters in the world, (and happy is it for the world the number is but *few*), the author wrote, "whom I really dislike to stain my pages by mentioning;--men, or rather monsters, who beat their wives!" See: "A Whisper to a Newly Married Pair," *The American Farmer*, January 13, 1826, 340-341. For more on domestic violence in antebellum America, see: Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy, eds, *Over the Threshold: Intimate Violence in Early America* (New York: Routledge, 1999), and Elizabeth Hafkin Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny: the Making of Social Policy against Family Violence from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[90] Asunción Lavrin, *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 1989), 257.

[91] For more on Spanish colonial laws and divorce petitions, see Arrom, Chapter Five, "Marital Relations and Divorce," in *The Women of Mexico City.*

[92] For more on domestic violence as an aspect of Mexican marriage, see Richard Boyer, Chapter Four, "Married Life," in *Lives of the Bigamists: Marriage, Family, and Community in Colonial Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995); Lyman Johnson and Sonya Lipsett-Rivera, eds, *The Faces of Honor: Sex, Shame, and Violence in Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998); Lavrin, *Sexuality and Marriage*; Steve Stern, *The Secret History of Gender: Women, Men, and Power in Late Colonial Mexico* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

accepted as an aspect of a natural, regular marriage—its absence perversely meant the collapse of the relationship. The practice was so common, De la Barca explained, that the husbands "consider[ed] it their particular privilege."[93]

Such practices sound very much like those observed in American Indian society; indeed, de la Barca specifies that these people were Mexican Indians. Although Americans wrote of such practices occurring throughout Spanish American society, they often associated them with the prevalence and influence of Indian heritage in the region. While most travel writing acknowledged Spanish American women to be far more hard-working than their lazy husbands, most specified that the domestic abuse they witnessed was only among the lowest classes. Travel writers often argued that it was the combination of Indian blood with the depravity of Catholic, Spanish traditions that created a double standard of female drudgery and male laziness. A contributor to the *Southern Quarterly Review* insisted that Mexico's priests were "incubi oppressing the bosom of the beautiful land and crushing its vitals by the weight of mingled superstition and despotism."[94] Such gendered language clearly intends to parallel the oppression of the land with that of its women. It also highlights antebellum Americans' virulent anti-Catholicism, and their belief—as old as the Puritan forefathers—that the religion manipulated its devotees, encouraged ignorance, and promoted sexual perversion. Catholicism, many Protestant Anglos believed, exacerbated the ignorance, lasciviousness, and laziness of Mexican men. Mexican Indians, one British traveler wrote, "seem devoid of that courage and ferocity which is generally attached to our ideas of savage life"—in other words, the ideal of the "noble savage"—and had "absolutely have no further perceptible ideas than eating, drinking, sleeping, and worshipping an image." The image of a Mexican Indian woman "hav[ing] to work much more than the men," often being "kicked and beat by the stronger sex," and "pant[ing] under a heavy load and a hot sun, while their husbands reel forwards with nothing but a guitar in their hands," certainly recalls depictions of American Indian society by both Europeans and Americans alike.[95]

What is implicit in these discussions of female work and submission is the suggestion that marriage to a white, American or European man would solve all problems. It would not eradicate the women's admirable work ethic, which—even when the labor was public—was rarely depicted as problematic, but would ease the burden by providing her with an equally industrious, appreciative white husband. No writer suggested that an Anglo man who married a Spanish American woman would be able to enjoy the opportunity for domestic violence, but the notion that Spanish American women were *so* obedient and submissive that they felt total domination to be natural may have seemed to some a pleasant affirmation of male power. The implication of what one writer called the "well known story" of an Englishman who attempted to stop a Guatemalan from beating his wife only to have her "abus[e] him for his interference" could be seen either as a shocking indication of the women's ignorance and oppression, or an admirable instance of marital loyalty and obedience.[96]

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[93] Frances Calderón de la Barca, *Life in Mexico, During a Residence of Two Years in That Country* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1843), 2: 356.
[94] "Mexico," *Southern Quarterly Review*, October 1847, 372.
[95] Mark Beaufoy, *Mexican Illustrations: Founded Upon Facts; Indicative of The Present Condition of Society, Manners, Religion, and Morals, Among the Spanish and Native Inhabitants of Mexico* (London: Carpenter and Son, 1828), 258-260.
[96] Godfrey Thomas Vigne, *Travels in Mexico, South America, Etc. Etc.* (London: William H Allen & Co, 1863), 16.

When it came to protecting their families, however, Spanish American women were reported to be far from weak-willed and submissive. Travel accounts often lauded the women's astonishing bravery, citing it as evidence that the lovely *señoritas* were such devoted, selfless mothers that they risked self-sacrifice to ensure their families' safety. The stories are similar to those told of American Indian women, suggesting that passionate courage and familial devotion were both an aspect of the "fiery" blood of darker races and a necessity of wild, dangerous frontier life.

In her analysis of frontier life in the sparse Colorado settlement of Pueblo during the 1840s, Janet LeCompte shows how Mexican women—often with last names that evidence Anglo husbands—developed a cool, staunch courage in the face of Indian threats. When Indians surprised her on a journey miles from her home, María Whittlesey tied herself to her baby with her *rebozo* and raced her horse to safety. Luisa Brown showed similar equine skill when she was pursued by a band of Apaches, tightly grasping her little son and forcing her horse to vault a deep arroyo. When Juana Simpson, her husband, and her baby were trapped in the snowy Sangre de Cristo Pass, her husband left her his gun while he sought their escape. Should the Utes in the valley below find her, Juana agreed to shoot herself rather than submit to capture.[97] Such women were the embodiment of the American ideal of a "frontier spirit;" despite their darker skins, they were clearly committed to being bastions of civilization against the "wild" Indians—a calling that both the Mexican and American governments and societies required of frontier families. Such courage and skill made these women ideal frontier wives. Furthermore, the shared enemy of the "wild" Indian linked Mexican women and American men in a common civilizing cause. While an Indian woman certainly had sufficient frontier skill to make a suitable partner, a Mexican woman combined these abilities with an added advantage: her association with a civilized—though, in American eyes, backwards—nation.

Henry Augustus Wise wrote that "the belle of California," a young girl named "Maríauna," was just such a perfect combination of athleticism, courage, and elegance. She had a "patrician style of beauty" and a "native elegance" that was not to be mistaken for feminine weakness. "Her bright eye, glancing along the delicate sights of her rifle, sent the leaden missive with the deadly aim of a marksman," and she "rode like an angel, and could strike a bullock dead with one quick blow of a keen blade." Furthermore, Mexican women were reportedly unafraid to use such deadly skills in warfare. During the Mexican Revolution, accounts reported that many Mexican women—usually those of Indian blood—fought right alongside the men, "and combatted with equal ardour and courage, regardless alike of hardships and danger." An Englishman, Captain G.F. Lyon, reported that some Indian women actually "rushed on the bayonets of those who had slain their husbands, for the wild satisfaction of killing with their daggers the soldiers who had fired the fatal shot."[98] In the fictional literature surrounding the Mexican-American War, female Mexican characters (including, interestingly, both Indians and women claiming aristocratic, "Spanish" blood) very often dressed as soldiers and proved their skill on the battlefield. While American authors in this period generally balked at placing white women in such desperately courageous, suspiciously manly roles, the American literary public seemed quite fascinated with the image of Mexican Boudiccas—especially when it was stressed

[97] LeCompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn*, 67.
[98] Wise, *Los Gringos,* 66-67; John Milton Miles, *A View of South American and Mexico* (New York: H Huntington, 1826), 163; Captain G.F. Lyon, *Journal of a Residence and Tour in the Republic of Mexico,* (London: John Murray, 1828), 2: 49

that they fought solely for their families and husbands.[99] Perhaps the appeal was based both on racialized romanticism and harsh reality: while the impassioned blood of darker races was thought to make women more bold, a nation beset with Revolution, Indian wars, and frontier dangers needed fearless women.

"How dulcet-toned are their voices, which, siren-like, irresistibly draw the willing victim within the giddy vortex of dissipation!" [100]

Sexuality

Travel accounts seemed to perpetually disagree about the sexuality of Spanish American women. While virtually all authors agreed that *señoritas* were more passionate and inherently more sexual than white women, they often had contradictory views about whether this translated into promiscuity.

Some accounts insisted that the Catholic Church and the so-called *dueña* system (in which an older woman, usually a widowed or unmarried relative, was assigned constant care of a young virgin) ensured that Spanish American women were chaste, obsessively watched, and forcibly virtuous. In his semi-monthly serial entitled *The Mexican Papers,* Edward Ely Dunbar addressed himself to the growing numbers of Americans interested in Mexico, promising that he would "not omi[t] to touch, suggestively, upon those intimate relations which, sooner or later, must be established between the two republics." Professing himself a knowledgeable pioneer "in those distant regions," Dunbar assured American readers that Mexican women—at least those of the upper classes—were watched as rigidly as any American belle: "the *dueña* system," he insisted, "was never carried out so strictly as it is in the central district of Mexico. As a general rule, it may be said that any woman whose virtue or position is worth preserving, is never beyond the reach of a rigid surveillance five minutes out of the twenty-four hours."[101]

Such an assurance, however, leaves out the realities of both the lower classes and the frontier areas, though it was on these subjects that the majority of Anglo travelers scribbled their impressions of Spanish American femininity. "Among the upper classes of Mexican females, I am inclined to think there is less virtue than with us," Lieutenant Raphael Semmes wrote in his published account of the Mexican-American War, and "among the lower classes, with rare exceptions, there is none."[102] As mining camps, frontier settlements, and other borderland areas tended particularly to attract Mexicans of the lower classes and darker races, Anglo writers were more likely to write of the astonishing *lack* of sexual control rather than its excess.

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[99] The prevalence of Mexican Boudiccas will be further discussed in Chapter Seven. American fiction in this time period did in fact have room for white, American women with a "fighting spirit," but this was generally only prevalent in frontier literature, where white women fought to defend their homes and families—or their own virtue—against Indians. See McCall, "Armed and 'More or Less Dangerous." Daryl Jones argues that the only white women in frontier fiction who really evidence a warlike spirit are "fallen"—i.e, victims of rape or seduction. Most women in dime novel westerns "remained symbols of the ideal woman, delicate damsels whose ultrafemininity betrayed itself through a marked capacity for fainting in moments of emotional crisis." Jones, "Blood 'N Thunder," 510-511.

[100] Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah,* 196.

[101] Edward E. Dunbar, *The Mexican Papers. The Mexican Question, The Great American Question, With Personal Reminiscences* (New York: J.A.H. Hasbrouck & Co, 1860), 147, 148.

[102] Lieutenant Raphael Semmes, *Service Afloat and Ashore During the Mexican War* (Cincinnati: W.M.H. Moore & Co, Publishers, 1851), 271.

Many of the travel narratives reported that Spanish American women were particularly coquettish, and sometimes downright lascivious—but then paradoxically insisted upon their charm, innocence, and even virtue. William Perkins, writing of his travels in Mexico in a journal he would publish in 1862, summarized the general consensus without appearing to comprehend its contradiction. "All Mexican women," he insisted "are lascivious, and sell themselves readily for love or money." Nonetheless, he continued, "there is no grossness or vulgarity to be seem amongst them. All are graceful, goodnatured and well behaved, and not a word or gesture to offend the most delicate ear or eye." This he explained by pointing to an exotic, foreign sexual culture. "In our countries when a woman loses her virtue she loses her self respect," he wrote. "Not so with the Mexican woman. She not only does not part with her self respect, but she retains caste." Although he never directly applauded this situation, he seemed to imply that Mexican women's sexuality was in some ways quite attractive, making them open, loving, and "goodnatured" without being "gross," "vulgar," or low-class. In Mexican society, Perkins' description suggested, a man and woman could enjoy passionate, even promiscuous sexual relations without either one of them suffering any loss of social status or respectability.[103]

Most writers, in fact, professed to enjoy this sexual openness rather than to prudishly spurn it. Wise wrote that his favorite of his Mexican host's two daughters was the one who was "very pretty" with "an adorable plump figure" and "very large black eyes, half shut with roguery, or coquetry." "Lovely Carmencita!" he exclaimed, as though her very memory conjured up long-lost feelings. She was, he insisted, "one of the most enchanting amourettes imaginable." It seems, however, that a pair of twinkling, flirting eyes was Wise's weakness, since only twenty pages later he dreamily remembered a totally different daughter, "Domatilda," who was just as "handsome" and "coquettish" and pranced through his memories like a "laughing nymph." Wise's recollections of hosts of lovely, flirty daughters is corroborated by the 1828 account of a military official in Texas. The Mexican women, he wrote, were "as a general rule, good-looking," and "ardently fond of luxury and leisure." Moreover, they had "rather loose ideas of morality, which cause the greater part of them to have shameful relations openly, especially with the officers."[104] Clearly, to both men, Spanish American women were the sexual aggressors in relations with Anglo men, who often had no choice but to be drawn irresistibly along by their enticements.

Just as attractive black women were generally portrayed as seductive "Jezebels" in a way that essentially negated the possibility of their rape by white men, Spanish American women were also thought to encourage sexual advances. A number of accounts reported the relative frequency of both premarital sex and elopement. In his sensationalized travelogue *Life in the Far West,* the British adventurer George Ruxton combined a host of experiences and stories he'd collected on the American frontier and welded them together into the tale of a trapper named LaBonte, insisting that everything he wrote was true. Drawing on the multitude of stories that described the consensual kidnapping of Mexican women (usually for the purpose of avoiding parental opposition to marriage), he told the story of an American trapper named Dick Wooton. One of many mountaineers who had journeyed to Taos for the express purpose of "tak[ing] to themselves a partner from among the belles," Dick had unfortunately wooed a damsel whose parents forbade a marriage. On the day of his departure, he rode up dejectedly "as if to bid her

[103] Perkins, *Three Years in California,* 361.
[104] Wise, *Los Gringos,* 28, 53; José María Sánchez, "A Trip to Texas in 1828," trans. Carlos E. Castañeda, *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (April, 1926): 251.

adieu." She, however, "whisper[ed] one word" and "put her foot upon his," whereupon she "was instantly seized round the waist, and placed upon the horn of his saddle." In a moment they were out of sight, deaf to the cries of the "astonished spectators of the daring rape."[105]

Such "rapes"—or kidnappings—or elopements—happened even among women of the upper-classes. One of the best-known stories concerned an upper-class girl named Josefa Carrillo, who in 1875 wrote down her own version of the romance that had become famous. Her seducer was also an American, a Captain Henry D. Fitch. When the Mexican Governor of San Diego refused to allow the marriage on the grounds that Fitch was a foreigner and a Protestant, the daring Captain convinced Josefa to elope. She stole secretly onto his ship and they sailed away, though the bold action so angered her father that, Josefa remembered, "he had promised to kill her on sight" for dishonoring the family.[106] It was no wonder Americans were entranced by romances like these; they seemed to vindicate the notion that American men were irresistible, as well as the fantasy of brave, passionate Spanish American womanhood.

The reality of such "rapes" is, however, somewhat more complex. Ruxton's use of the word itself is suggestive of a cultural disconnect. If the elopement was consensual, why would Ruxton use a term that connotes force? It is possible that Ruxton, who spent many years in the borderlands and in Mexico itself, was actually directly translating a Spanish term—*rapto*—that has no exact equivalent in English. In Spanish, "*rapto*" means, alternately, "kidnapping," "rape," or "rapture." In Spanish law, *rapto* referred to the abduction of a woman with the intention either of sex or marriage. Historian Kathryn Sloan's work *Runaway Daughters* examines a wide range of *rapto* cases in nineteenth-century Oaxaca. Her analysis reveals a number of intriguing points. Firstly, she holds that *rapto* was a relatively widespread phenomenon, quite common in court records and often portrayed in popular culture. Secondly, she claims that 90% of the cases were consensual, theorizing that *rapto* was actually a means by which young, Mexican girls asserted their own will against that of their families or communities, choosing their own partners and assuming agency over their own bodies and futures.[107] Seen from this perspective, the multiple definitions of *rapto*—from abduction to assault to romantic bliss—make more sense. They also enable a more nuanced interpretation of the aforementioned stories: Mexican women like Wooton's lover or Josefa Carrillo weren't hypersexual women so obsessed with American men that they abandoned their communities to pursue them. Instead, they were much more likely to have been determined young women who were acting out well-established cultural roles that women from a range of social classes and time periods had chosen with both Spanish American and North American men.

Virtually all of American or European men's notions of Spanish American women's sexuality can be similarly reanalyzed and redefined in the context of the region's social and cultural norms. It is, of course, difficult to speak for particular individuals, who may have been just as promiscuous or prudish as Anglo travelers made them out to be. Nonetheless, an understanding of general cultural and social tendencies illuminates the reasons behind the contradictions in texts about Spanish America.

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[105] Ruxton, *Life in the Far West*, 267-68.

[106] Richard Griswold del Castillo, "Neither Activists nor Victims: Mexican Women's Historical Discourse: The Case of San Diego, 1820-1850,"*California History* 74, no. 3 (Fall, 1995): 232-233.

[107] Katherine Sloan, *Runaway Daughters : Seduction, Elopement, and Honor in Nineteenth-Century Mexico* **(**Albuquerque : University of New Mexico Press, 2008**)**, 4, 61—73.

Certainly, the Catholic Church was overtly strict about keeping sex within marriage. And, certainly, Catholic teachings, European standards of morality and gender roles, and Victorian ideas of "true" womanhood and manhood influenced Spanish American culture. A system of "honor" much like that in the American South existed in Spanish America, an import from Iberia that became rigidly entrenched at all levels of society. A man's honor was based on his courage and his ability to protect both his own and his family's reputation, often with violence. A woman's honor, on the other hand, was based on her virtue—more specifically, on her virginity before marriage and chastity within it.[108] Historian Ramon Gutiérrez terms this specific type of female honor "*vergüenza*," and explains that women displayed it "when they were sexually pure and displayed the utmost discretion around men."[109] Yet just as with its seemingly rigid racial hierarchy, Spanish American society allowed a considerable amount of flexibility within its sexual standards.

As in North American society, Spanish American sexual culture varied among different classes and different races—and, like its northern neighbor, class and race were intrinsically related. Because the upper-class prided itself on its claim to racial purity, virgin girls were very carefully watched up until the moment of their marriage. The maintenance of a daughter's purity reflected on the purity of the family itself; in other words, its ability to ensure an immaculate bloodline as well as the ideal of demure, obedient femininity. In this way, "honor" for upper-class women—the maintenance of one's own and one's family's reputation—hinged specifically on virginity.[110]

Lower class women, on the other hand, were not so carefully policed, and Spanish American historians argue that lower-class culture did not place as high a premium on virginity. For one thing, lower-class women often had to spend much more time out of the home and unsupervised than elite ladies, since their status often required them to work. For another, many were mixed-race, descended from Africans or Indians whose social culture placed less of an emphasis on virginity than did American or European whites. Furthermore, lower-class women had the paradoxical opportunity to *rise* in society by engaging in non-marital sex. Spanish America's legal and social systems provided a number of ways for upper-class men to pursue sexual liaisons with lower-class women without having to marry them. A double legal standard existed that punished women for non-marital sex but generally spared men. Under colonial rule, for example, upper-class men were spared the legal requirement of marrying a lower-class woman they had seduced. In 1752, the Crown announced that "if the maiden seduced under promise of marriage is inferior in status, so that she would cause greater dishonor to his lineage if he married her than the one that would fall on her by remaining seduced . . . , he must [not] marry her."[111] The priority, the Crown decided, was the man's superior personal and familial

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[108] A number of Latin American scholars have addressed the notion of "honor" in Latin American society, and the ways it changed over time and within the social hierarchy. See Johnson and Rivera, *The Faces of Honor*; Ramón Gutiérrez, "From Honor to Love: Transformations of the Meaning of Sexuality in Colonial Mexico," in *Kinship, Ideology and Practice in Latin America,* ed. Raymond Smith (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1984); Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came;* Patricia Seed, *To Love, Honor, and Obey in Colonial Mexico: Conflicts over Marriage Choice, 1574—1821* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988)*;* Lavrin, *Sexuality and Marriage*; Stern, *The Secret History of Gender;* Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets*.

[109] Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came,* 209.

[110] See specifically Chapter Four, "Honor" in Seed, *To Love, Honor, and Obey,* and Chapter One, "Antecedents," in Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets.*

[111] Dictamen de Dr. Tembra, 1752, quoted in Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came,* 217.

honor, not the woman's. According to Silvia Arrom, not much changed even after Independence. A lower-class woman, therefore, could become the *barragana*—or concubine—of an upper-class man in order to benefit from his protection and generosity. Furthermore, if he decided to leave her and she complained of seduction to the court, she and her family could receive financial compensation.[112]

For these reasons, lower-class society generally defined "*vergüenza*" differently than their social superiors. As Kathryn Sloan explains in her analysis of lower-class Oaxacans, poor women had their own version of honor that differed quite markedly from that of the elite. Although court records show that working-class Oaxacans consistently used the word "honor," therefore assuming the cultural standards of the elite, it is evident that they had alternate definitions. Female virginity was certainly upheld, but a woman's honor was reflected far more in her hard work, modest behavior, and virtuous comportment. When defending their honor in court, then, poor women spoke less of their virginity and more of their industriousness, their avoidance of small talk with strange men, or their insistence on only having sex with one man—even if he was not their husband.[113]

American men must therefore have found the negotiation of Spanish American sexual standards and institutions to be relatively similar to that in the United States. There, too, laws, institutions, and certain cultural mores allowed casual or non-marital sexual relations with women of inferior social and racial positions but preserved the racial and sexual purity of the upper classes, thereby allowing social advancement through marriage. Nonetheless, there appears to have been a certain flexibility extending to all classes in Spanish America that was far less visible or culturally institutionalized in North America. The differences were striking enough to Anglo visitors to be recorded far more than the similarities.

Among all social classes in Spanish America, there was a significant amount of premarital sex permitted under the conditions of betrothal. In Catholic tradition, betrothal, which often involved a ceremony with witnesses and family members in attendance, often signified the right to exercise conjugal rights. The potential problem, however, was that no binding marital vows had actually been taken, so a betrothal could be legally broken. To many American Protestants, this tradition simply appeared as permissible pre-marital sex, secured by vague promises of marriage without the assured security of a formal vow.[114] Nonetheless, Spanish American society had in place several contingency plans in the case of an illegitimate birth. Ann Twinam's analysis of the public/private duality of upper-class women's sexual lives demonstrates that elite Spanish American women were not always stigmatized if they engaged in non-marital sex. A number of these women chose to birth their babies in private while showing

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[112] See specifically "Conclusion" in Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City;* Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came,* 209-220; Martínez, Chapter Nine, "Limpieza de Sangre in the Age of Reason and Reform," in *Genealogical Fictions.* For more on *barraganas,* see Borah and Cook, "Marriage and Legitimacy in Mexican Culture," 950—951.

[113] Sloan, *Runaway Daughters,* 174.

[114] Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came,* 264. In some Protestant European countries, like England, public betrothals did allow sex before marriage, but the practice was far less common in America. Sex during courting was, as historian Ellen Rothman shows, relatively rare in America in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, with only the latter half of the latter century showing any noticeable increase in premarital pregnancies (as well as the brief popularity of the practice of "bundling"). By the nineteenth century, however, the association of sexual purity and passionlessness with the "cult of true womanhood" meant that premarital sex, even during betrothal, seems to have become increasingly less common, at least among the middle and upper classes. Ellen Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (New York: Basic Books, Inc, 1984), 45-51.

the public a virtuous façade, and gave the babies to a childless relative or an orphanage. Others gave the excuse of an "extended engagement," assuring society that a marital promise existed and would be fulfilled.[115]

Even more shocking to many Anglo visitors was the social flexibility that Spanish Americans often gave to illegitimate children. Twinam explains that while race and birth were permanently fixed in English America, "in Hispanic America both variables had in between categories: an individual might have more than one racial or birth status at the same time." Just as a person of one race could "pass" into a higher, lighter category by assuming an improved social or economic status, so an individual might "pass" into legitimacy by achieving personal or social success. And, just as a person could in colonial times apply for a *gracias al sacar* to legalize an assumed racial status, so an illegitimate adult could apply for legal legitimation. Finally, just as a host of descriptive terms existed to categorize a range of intermediary races between "black" and "white" or "white" and "Indian," so a complex vocabulary signified public acknowledgement of positions somewhere between "legitimate" or "bastard." "Bastards" were only from adulterous or sacrilegious births, while "illegitimate" simply signified that one's parents were not officially married. As will be further detailed in this chapter, one main reason for these traditions was the fact that so-called unofficial, common-law marriages were almost as prevalent as legal unions in Spanish America. Individuals were therefore often treated as legitimate children if their families treated them as such. Legitimacy was based more on private and public treatment and status than on legal norms.[116]

To many Americans and Europeans, such flexibility must have seemed too sexually permissible. It went hand in hand with many other traditions and activities they tended to see as promiscuous. Public bathing, for instance, was commented upon by almost all Anglo travelers as a shockingly immodest ritual that Spanish Americans generally brushed off as playful, nonsexual, and downright necessary.[117] Smoking, too, amazed and repulsed many visitors. In the United States and Northern Europe, smoking was generally a male pastime, yet Spanish Americans of both sexes smoked openly and often. Their indulgence in things like smoking, eating chocolate, and drinking strong alcohol was often interpreted as an addiction to depravity in general.[118]Nonetheless, many Anglo commentators admitted a certain, sensual attraction to smoking: the Ohioan explorer Louis Garrard wrote that the combination of the smoky haze, magnetic gazes, and "dulcet-toned" voices of Mexican women "irresistibly draw the willing victim within the giddy vortex of dissipation!"[119] This, it appears, was the main problem with Spanish American women: addicted to vices themselves, they were nonetheless so personally addictive that men found themselves drawn into dissipation despite their most virtuous protests.

Nothing proved Spanish American women's open and accessible sexuality more than their dancing. Anglo men watched, agog, as Spanish American women danced in a gyrating, openly sexual way that drew the gaze to swiveling hips and un-corseted, bouncing breasts. They also pressed themselves far more closely to their male partners than traditional North American or European dances allowed. In Mexico, even the church recognized that sexual restraints were

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[115] Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets*, 61—66, 83.
[116] Ibid., 25, 26, 13, 128, 159.
[117] Ruxton and Kendall describe the activity as both shocking (to them) and normal (to Mexicans) See Ruxton, *Travels in Mexico,* 70; Kendall, *Narrative of the Sante Fe Expedition,* 2: 145.
[118] Pike, *The United States and Latin America,* 58.
[119] Garrard, *Wah-to-yah*, 171.

sometimes loosened during dances, and many a religious official pleaded with the state to crack down on public dances. Women were usually the first to be blamed. "You women, dancers of the devil, scandalous persons," one Mexican preacher exclaimed in a sermon in 1800, "you are the damnation of so many souls. You provocative women, dancers of the devil, scandal, nets of the devil, basilisks of the streets and windows, you kill with your stirrings."[120]

Even when Anglo men professed to be repulsed by what one called "half-barbaric orgies," they nonetheless often felt the need to describe them in detail.[121] Others found the dances fun, engaging, amusing, and even democratic. "The etiquette of the baile-room in New Mexico is quite accommodating," Davis wrote approvingly, "and there is no barrier against a person selecting whom he may desire for a partner." In fact, a man did not even have to introduce himself to a woman before securing her for a dance, but had only to catch her eye and put out his hand. Be bold enough for that, Davis promised his male readers in a specific address, "and she is yours for the set," a "willing captive."[122] To men of the lower classes who, perhaps, felt shy entering hierarchical ball rooms, such a promise must have been quite exciting. The designation "captive," furthermore, suggested the opportunity for the exercise of masculine power and ownership of the female body.

Despite their reservations about Spanish American women's modesty—or lack thereof—a great many travel writers began to excuse the women's questionable actions. After initially affecting a shocked tone, many authors then suggested that such traditions were, in fact, innocent and pleasant. Ruxton described the naked women and girls he saw bathing in the canal as dressed "in the garb of Eve"—in other words, as sweetly naïve about their nakedness as the inhabitants of Eden. They "tumbl[ed] and splash[ed] in the water" like "ducks in a puddle," in no way "disconcerted by the gaze" of onlookers but "laugh[ing] and jok[ing] in perfect innocence, and unconsciousness of perpetrating an impropriety." Kendall similarly excused the Mexican women who "take to the water so naturally" from "betraying a want of modesty" by explaining that "with the girls of Mexico there is an absence of all thought that they are doing wrong, which should fully exculpate them from blame." As for the fandangos danced "in a very sprightly, roguish manner," Henry Augustus Wise insisted they were "innocent ballets" shocking to "the nerves of a more refined audience," but not "in the least degree improper." They were simply "the harmless customs and amusements of [the] country." Wise declared rather rebelliously, "I am fond of a notion of cayenne to existence."[123] Such a statement implies that "refined audiences" in America had become too bland when compared to the "cayenne"—the spice, heat, passion and excitement—of life in Mexico. To most Anglo men who stayed for any extended length of time in Spanish America, this "spice" began to seem sweet, more innocent and childlike. American travelers in particular insisted that it was this simple, trusting, naïve aspect that made Spanish American women become devoted and deeply loving to their racial, sexual, and national superiors: white, American men.

From their very first encounters with *señoritas*, American men insisted that Spanish American women found them utterly irresistible. George Kendall devoted pages and pages of his narrative of Mexican imprisonment to praise of the lovely, generous ladies who couldn't bear to see him and his fellow prisoners mistreated, and who lavished them with gifts, food, and pity. It

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[120] Priest quoted Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came*, 239. For more on the outlawing of dances, see Ibid., 39—40.
[121] Bernard Taylor, *Eldorado: Adventures in the Path of Empire* (1850; repr., New York: Putnam & Son, 1868), 82.
[122] Davis, *El Gringo*, 264-265.
[123] Ruxton, *Travels in Mexico*, 70; Kendall, *Narrative of the Santa Fé Expedition*, 2: 145; Wise, *Los Gringos*, 30.

was only natural, to Kendall, that a number of the women fell in love with them. He remarked almost offhandedly that the daughter of a "Don Antonio" fell so "ardent[ly]" in love with one of his American companions that she "was affected even to tears and hysterics when he was ordered to leave the city." Kendall never bothered to mention whether the man showed any sign of reciprocation, but instead felt the need to inform his readers that "it is said that no attachment can be stronger, no love more enduring, than that of the better-informed Mexican *doncella*, when once her heart is touched by the blue eyes, light hair, and fair complexion of some roving Anglo-Saxon." Her love is so pure, true, and unfaltering, he explained, that "she loves as long as she lives."[124]

The stereotype was so prevalent and widely accepted among American men that it was reflected in popular songs of the Mexican-American War. A patriotic song published as part of the booster literature promoting the Mexican-American War assured young "Yankee" men that Mexican women were practically begging them to conquer their lands, save them from their pathetic male partners, and "clasp their budding charms." Titled "They Wait for Us—Spanish Brides," the lyrics described a fantasy scene of a "Spanish maid" whose "eye of fire" indicated her desperate need to be ravaged—although, as the title indicates, also legitimately married.

> At balmy evening [she] turns her lyre
> And, looking to the Eastern sky,
> Awaits our Yankee chivalry,
> Whose purer blood and valiant arms,
> Are fit to clasp her budding charms.
> The man, her mate, is sunk in sloth—
> To love, his senseless heart is loth:
> The pipe and glass and tinkling lute;
> A sofa, and a dish of fruit;
> A nap, some dozen times a day;
> Sombre and sad, and never gay.[125]

Second Lieutenant Henry Bulls Watson, who was stationed in California between 1845 and 1848, affirmed the truth of this claim. "The females of California prefer by large odds the Americans for husbands" he stated, because "the Americans love to work, they have good houses and plenty to live on, and make kind husbands." In other words, their work ethic matched that of the supposedly industrious *señoritas*, and their houses were perfect havens for the women's reported domestic skills. Moreover, it was asserted, American husbands never took advantage of female obedience, submission, and dedication as did Mexican men, and would never subject the women to drudgery or abuse. Lieutenant Watson reported that even Mexican men understood that Americans represented the perfect complement to a *señorita's* virtues, and that a Mexican General had remarked that "a Mexican or Californian stood no chance with the girls when an American was by."[126]

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[124] Kendall, *Narrative of the Santa Fé Expedition*, 1: 336.

[125] The poem was originally published in the Boston *Uncle Sam* on June 20, 1846 and appeared among a handful of patriotic poems in William M'Carty, ed., *National Songs, Ballads, and Other Patriotic Poetry, Chiefly Relating to the War of 1846* (Philadelphia: William M'Carty, 1846), 45.

[126] Lieutenant Henry Bulls Watson, quoted in Moreno, "Here the Society Is United," 11.

Henry Augustus Wise claimed that Mexican women's hopes for American husbands meant that they *welcomed* their conquerors when, during the Mexican-American War, U.S. troops marched victoriously into village and town plazas. Only a little while after the American army's entrance into a town, he wrote, "the women, bless their sweet, forgiving souls, sought the main plaza in the afternoons," and generously bestowed "flashing glances or murmured salutations." In fact, Spanish American women of all nations were apparently so convinced of the need for American domination that they immediately began the process of miscegenation in the hopes of bettering their race and society. "Many of the women showed us their white picanninnies and said, *Americana*," forty-niner Hiram Dwight Pierce wrote of his time in California. Another American traveling in Honduras wrote that a "yellow dame" proudly showed off her "blue-eyed, flaxen-haired child" to the Americans, and apparently "gloried" in her "escapade" with the child's father.[127] Such reports are particularly interesting because they reflect a tendency to compare these Spanish Americans to black women. "Picaninny" was a term given to black children, and the color "yellow" was most often attributed to mulattos or quadroons. Perhaps the racial association indicates that these women were themselves of African descent. However, it may also indicate the American tendency to attribute both sexual looseness and obsession with white men to all women of darker races, no matter their nationality or ethnicity.

In 1858, Phocion R. Way wrote in a diary of his travels from his home in Cincinnati to the mines of Arizona that "there is so little difference between the Mexicans and the Indians that I can hardly tell them apart." Yet instead of detailing a physical resemblance, Way referred to their similar characteristics—most specifically, their total dedication to a white lover. "All Mexican or Indian women here are very proud to get a white man for a lover," he asserted. "They will work and drudge for them and never leave them if they can help it. Nearly all Americans who have been in this country long keep a Mexican woman. It is so common here that no notice is taken of it." Rather than claim that American men treated Mexican women better, valuing their industriousness, domestic virtues, and loyalty, however, Way casually went on to explain that when American men "get tired of [a Mexican woman] or wish to leave the country they turn her off without ceremony." Indeed, he explained, "the women expect this, bear their loss with fortitude and console themselves with another man the first opportunity, but they will never have anything to do with a Mexican if they can get a white man."[128]

Such stark honesty is rather startling when compared to previous avowals of devoting, loving relationships between American men and Spanish American women. Yet Way was writing in his personal, private diary: he had no need to sugar-coat reality for prudish Victorian audiences, and the harsh truth in 1858, after a decade of American rule in the Mexican territories, seemed to be that many American men treated Spanish American women in a very similar way to black concubines and Indian wives. Nonetheless, Way did feel the need to briefly make an excuse for the *señoritas*, admitting that they were "affectionate, warm hearted and generous to a fault." In fact, he wrote, "if they were brought up in good society and surrounded by proper influences, I have no doubt they would make refined and virtuous women." Unfortunately, he continued, "the way they are raised here you cannot expect anything

[127] Wise, *Los Gringos,* 147; Hiram Dwight Pierce, *A Forty-Niner Speaks,* quoted in Greenberg, 128; "Hunting a Pass: A Sketch of Tropical Adventure, Part 3," *The Atlantic Monthly* 6, July 1860, 57.
[128] William A. Duffen, "Overland Via 'Jackass Mail' in 1858: The Diary of Phocion R. Way," *Arizona and the West* 2, no. 3 (Autumn, 1960): 292.

better of them."[129] Rather than value the women for their good qualities and coax them into a virtuous lifestyle, it appears that many American men simply abused the advantage of the *señoritas*' availability. If they were "raised that way"—in other words, if they were of a lower racial and social class that permitted a greater extent of non-marital liaisons—American men felt no need to treat them like respectable white women. The advantage in Spanish American society was that an American man had an extensive range of options where sexual relations were concerned. Like race, social status, and legitimacy, the very category of marriage itself was flexible and fluid.

"There is much romance to a superficial observer in having a Mexican wife."[130]

Marriage and Divorce

In his popular work *Life in the Far West*, George Ruxton summarized all the racial, sexual, romantic and realistic reasons American frontiersmen sought out Mexican wives. Trappers, traders, and mountain-men specifically planned trips to New Mexico with "matrimonial intentions," he asserted, because they believed that "the belles of Nuevo Mejico" were "the *ne plus ultra* of female perfection." Instead of describing the apex of femininity in white, Victorian terms, Ruxton listed a medley of perfectly blended racial and sexual stereotypes that serves almost as an advertisement for miscegenation as the solution to a "crisis of femininity."[131]

Besides their "most conspicuous personal charms"—those un-corseted, bouncing bosoms and sparkling black eyes— Ruxton confirmed the stereotype of diligent, even drudge-like domesticity, stating that Mexican women had "all the hardworking industry of Indian squaws." They were, furthermore, just as brave and intrepid as stories and legends proclaimed, the perfect frontier wives who "do not hesitate to . . . share the perils and privations of the American mountaineers in the distant wilderness." Finally, he confirmed that they were just as besotted with American men as popular myth suggested, "utterly despising their own countrymen" and hugely admiring the "dashing white hunters who swagger in all the pride of fringe and leather through their towns."[132] To Ruxton, a British traveler who spent many years on the American frontier, this phenomenon of white men specifically seeking out non-white partners on the basis of their racial and sexual stereotypes may have seemed far more obvious—and the reasons more comprehensible—than to an American observer rooted in the prejudices of his society.

In any case, Mexican wives appeared attractive to a far greater range of would-be American Romeos than just the mountain-men. According to Rebecca Craver in her work on New Mexican intermarriage, "most of the immigrants who became economically and politically successful in Northern Mexico between 1821 and 1846 were married to local Mexican women." Even after the borderlands came under U.S control, many American soldiers and settlers of all classes chose to marry local *señoritas*. In New Mexico, church records demonstrate that about seventy-five percent of male foreigners who arrived between 1820 and 1850 married Mexican women.[133] The 1850 census reveals that nearly fifty percent of all Euro-American men in Santa

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[129] Ibid., 292.
[130] Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah*, 196.
[131] George Ruxton, *Life in the Far West*, 2nd ed. (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1851), 233.
[132] Ibid., 233.
[133] Craver, *The Impact of Intimacy*, 1, 4.

Fe lived with Mexican women who seem to have been their wives.[134] In California, the exact number of intermarriages between Californios and Americans is unknown, but nineteenth-century historian Hubert Howe Bancroft's biographical compilation of prominent California pioneers records eighty intermarriages between 1817 and 1848.[135] A full fifteen per cent of recorded marriages in California during the Mexican period were intercultural, and Sir George Simpson, governor in chief of the Hudson Bay Company territories in North America, wrote in 1841 that "Foreigners and natives [Californios] cordially mingle together as members of one and the same harmonious family."[136]

Americans were well aware of the extent of intermarriage in the borderlands, and many seemed to seek it out with rather romantic associations. In 1850, Lewis Garrard wrote in his travel narrative that "there is much romance to a superficial observer in having a Mexican wife." Although he believed there could be "no intellectual enjoyment" in such a marriage, he admitted that there "*were* attractions . . . of the baser sort." For men who solely desired a doting, industrious, passionate wife who, aware of her inferior status, was blissfully compliant and submissive, such a description was ideal. During the Mexican-American War, the *Spirit of the Times* merrily stated that "some of our Yankee boys, who have 'listed in the Mexican service, appear to be having 'tall times' among the pretty señoritas."[137]Clearly, it was far more permissible for an American periodical to write about such suggestive revelry among Spanish Americans than among Indian or black women. The appreciation of "pretty señoritas" was one that was openly and popularly acknowledged.

But why was marriage to a Spanish American woman so common and accepted? Why were American men, so conscious of their society's stigmas against interracial relations, willing to contract legal, binding, official unions with non-white women? After all, various types of concubinage—some casually labeled "marriage" but never officially recognized—sufficed quite ideally for Indian and black women in the United States.

The simplest answer is twofold: for one thing, many Americans considered marriage in Spanish America to be less binding than in the United States. There were many different types, ranging from an official Catholic or civil ceremony, to a common-law marriage, to the system of *barraganía* concubinage. For another, Americans were more willing to contract actual, legitimate marriages with Spanish American women (usually of the upper classes) because it was felt that their claims to racial purity, as well as the social status, lands, and wealth that often came with their dowries, more than outweighed any qualms about inferior racial or national qualities.

In antebellum North America, a white woman of virtually any social class needed to contract an actual, legitimate marriage if she wished to be seen as respectable and to enjoy certain legal benefits and protections for herself and her children. In Spanish America, on the other hand, women of all classes contracted common-law unions as well as legitimate church or civil marriages. The practice was far more prevalent among the lower classes, but it nonetheless existed among elite families, as well. Ignacia Jamarillo, the sister of Kit Carson's wife Josefa, was of a wealthy, prominent Taos family. Though she lived with him for twelve years and bore

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[134] Deena González, *Refusing the Favor: The Spanish-Mexican Women of Santa Fe, 1820—1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 73.
[135] Hurtado, *Intimate Frontiers*, 36.
[136] Moreno, "Here Society is United," 3.
[137] Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah*, 196; *The Spirit of the Times*, quoted in Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas*, 170.

him five children, the wealthy American merchant Charles Bent (who was also the first American governor of the New Mexico territory) never officially married her.[138]

The tradition of common-law marriages extended far back to a Spanish folk practice that originated under Roman occupation, wherein a man and woman might "join together without formality for a temporary or permanent union." The woman was considered a "quasi-wife" as long as the man did not marry another woman, and the Spanish Catholic church recognized these unions as a true form of marriage even though they were not legal or official. When the Spanish arrived in the Americas, these practices provided an advantageous opportunity to contract unions with native women without a loss of social status, or any barrier against future marriage with a white, Spanish woman.[139] The practice became increasingly common in the colonial period among all classes and races. It provided upper-class men with an opportunity to contract a longstanding—but not binding nor very socially detrimental—union with a woman of a lower class, and it also provided members of the lower class with a far easier and less expensive alternative to marriage.

Official marriage in Mexico had historically been very hard. When under the jurisdiction of the church, it was not only expensive (requiring high fees for the priest), but also needed to be approved by a dispensation, which presented a dizzying array of obstacles. A person was ineligible if he or she had a "religious condition" (such as a church vow) possessed physical "inadequacies" (like impotence), or had committed a crime. A couple was also ineligible if they possessed consanguinity to the fourth degree, even if this simply meant that a man had had sex with one sister and wished to marry another. After Independence, marriage caused a similar headache in that church dispensations gave way to official government sanctions—which required paperwork, fees, and long waiting periods. In Indian towns, frontier regions, and other areas far from the grasp of either church or civil institutions, people often couldn't be bothered with the time, expense, travel and inconvenience. Of 122 marriages in New Mexico's Rio Arriba between 1821 and 1846, for example, eighty-nine were church-sanctioned and thirty-three were common-law—and these were only the ones officially recorded.[140]

In places like California, New Mexico, and other historically Mexican borderlands, the practice came to be adopted by Anglo men for much the same reason that the white, Spanish conquerors had initially introduced it: as a simple, non-committal means by which to obtain all the advantages of a wife without losing status because of her inferior race or class. "As yet," William Perkins wrote in his published journal of life in San Francisco, "we have no *wives* in California. Thousands of women there are, but these are all mistresses or independent. This state is so common that it excites no remark." To those unfamiliar with the old Spanish customs, Perkins explained that "The mistress occupies here the same position that the wife does in other countries, and most of the women are of a class that think it no disgrace. . . . [They] in fact prefer this temporary union to the one blessed by the priest."[141]

Another option that American men inherited from the original Spanish colonists was the practice of *barraganía,* or concubinage. This was often the course taken for unions with women who were very obviously of a lower racial caste, such as Indians, blacks, or those of particularly

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[138] Simmons, *Kit Carson and His Three Wives,* 61—65.
[139] Borah and Cook, "Marriage and Legitimacy in Mexican Culture," 949—961.
[140] Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came,* 246-247; Borah and Cook, "Marriage and Legitimacy in Mexican Culture," 965-966; Craver, *The Impact of Intimacy,* 4.
[141] Perkins, *Three Years in California,*131.

dark, mixed racial stock. In their analysis of Mexican marriage law, scholars Woodrow Borah and Sherburne Cook argued that "colored women were especially prized as mistresses" in the colonial period, when there was a relatively high percentage of concubinage.[142] According to historian Jane Dysart, it was particularly established in military outposts like San Antonio well into the mid-nineteenth century. One young Alabamian, writing from San Antonio in 1855, reported that there were "no houses of ill fame in this place, but many of these [Mexican women] of fine figures and good features, the color of a mulatto, are kept by votaries of sensuability."[143] To an American Southerner or a Northerner familiar with Southern society, such an arrangement would likely have seemed relatively normal. In any case, it was rapidly taken up by American men who entered the borderlands in increasing numbers from the 1820s on.

Interestingly, however, Americans seemed less inclined than Spanish or Mexican men to treat a concubine like a wife. While census records from the Spanish and Mexican periods indicate that a man and his *barragana* usually lived together in the same house, the censuses of 1850 and 60 show that, under American rule, a man and his *barragana* generally lived apart. Furthermore, under Spanish and Mexican rule any children born of the union usually took their father's name, whereas children after the American takeover assumed their mother's name and were rarely recorded as attending school. Clearly, while concubinage had successfully Hispanicized many non-white women and their children, Americanization seemed neither encouraged nor intended.[144] As with quadroon mistresses and Indian wives, mixed-race children usually seemed an unfortunate consequence of a union that was primarily intended for sexual and domestic comfort.

Spanish American women, like Indian "wives," often seemed to have been passed around trading camps or among trading partners. These women were not considered prostitutes, but seemed rather to be the lovers and housekeepers of their successive domestic partners. Antonia Luna lived at Taos with Jim Beckworth and then Kit Carson, who allegedly abandoned her immediately after she told him Beckworth was a better lover. After that, she moved on to two other, successive Americans, Bill Williams and then William Tharp, and bore the latter two children. Another Mexican woman, Nicolasa, lived in the tiny frontier settlement of El Pueblo, and was apparently so intensely desirable that she caused a number of duels. Reuben Herring killed her first lover Henry Beer, and stayed with her until she abandoned his bed to take up with a French trapper, who was then shot dead by the sober New Englander John Brown. Brown eventually left her for a more respectable Mexican woman, Luisa Sandoval, and Nicolasa then took up with the young Santa Fe trader Ed Tharp. Ed, too, was eventually shot dead by Jim Waters, who so feared the vengeance of Ed's brother William (who, incidentally, was one of Antonia Luna's lovers) that he never returned to claim Nicolasa. It is certain that Nicolasa, at least, was part Indian, and Antonia Luna was likely also of mixed descent. In any case, Antonia's nickname, "Luna," was said to reference mental instability, so neither woman was considered an exemplar of "true womanhood." Neither seemed to care how many lovers she possessed, whether or not she was married to them, or even what race they were; Jim Beckworth, for example, was a mulatto.[145] Mexican woman like Antonia and Nicolasa would likely have given

[142] Borah and Cook, "Marriage and Legitimacy in Mexican Culture," 962.
[143] Alabamian quoted in Dysart, "Mexican Women in San Antonio," 368.
[144] Dysart, "Mexican Women in San Antonio," 369.
[145] LeCompte, *Pueblo, Hardscrabble, Greenhorn,* 73, 199-200; Simmons, *Kit Carson and His Three Wives,* 40.

many of the earliest American frontiersmen a rather skewed idea of Mexican femininity, marital traditions, racial lineage, and sexual practices.

Of course, American men understood that the Catholic Church was ostensibly very strict about sex and marriage. Nonetheless, many Americans had a deep distrust—and sometimes even a loathing—of the Catholic Church, and tended to blame it for Spanish American depravity and ignorance.[146] To many Protestant Americans, Catholicism was a corrupt religion that prioritized meaningless ritual over individual spirituality, allowing sins to be swept under the rug by a certain number of confessions, prayers, indulgences, and bribes. Many writers felt that Spanish American wedding vows were simply gilt paint over a host of infidelities. "As soon as [the girls in San Antonio] are married," one Texas colonist wrote in his journal, "they are scarcely the same creatures, giving the freest indulgence to their naturally gay and enthusiastic dispositions, as if liberated from all moral restraint." Many North Americans seemed to think that Spanish Americans treated marriage in a similar way to Indian communities: it seemed loosely organized and enforced, with divorce common and adultery rampant. "In New Mexico, the institution of marriage changes the legal rights of the parties, but it scarcely affects their moral obligations," Josiah Gregg wrote in his famous narrative of frontier trade. "It is usually looked upon as a convenient cloak for irregularities." Davis used the same metaphor, arguing that the Catholic sacrament of marriage was a farce because "it always serves as a cloak to hide numerous irregularities that many of the married females are prone to indulge in, which can be practiced with more facility in the wedded than in the single state."[147]

In fact, a number of Americans attempted to argue that, as in Indian communities, polygamy was also common in Spanish American families. "It is the custom for married men to support a wife and mistress at the same time, and but too frequently the wife also has her male friend," Davis asserted. To lend credence to his claim, he referenced "a gentleman of many years' residence in the country" who assured him that "such practices are indulged in by three fourths of the married population," and that "the custom of keeping mistresses appears to be part of the social system." That "mode of life," he claimed provocatively, "is practiced openly and without shame." The American Special Ambassador to Central America, John Lloyd Stephens, wrote in his travelogue that he stayed at a hacienda with a man who possessed two wives. He told his host that "in England he would be transported, and in the North imprisoned for life for such indulgences." The man replied that England and the United States were therefore "barbarous countries," and even one of his wives admitted that "although she thought a man ought to be content with one, . . . it was no *peccato,* or crime, to have two."[148] It is most likely that Stephens had encountered a man with one legitimate and one common-law wife, or a *barragana,* since bigamy and polygamy were prohibited by church and state and harshly punished in Spanish America.[149] But to North American and European travelers, the distinctions must have seemed very hazy: if so few Spanish Americans distinguished between their legitimate, common-law, or

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[146] One example is Dunbar's work, which attributed the ills of Mexico to "the evils of three hundred and forty years of a false religion and a wicked government," and described the churchgoing crowd as beset by "filth, disease, deformity, brutishness ad abject heathenism." Dunbar, *The Mexican Papers,* 149.

[147] Texas colonist quoted in James M. Lacy, "New Mexican Women in Early American Writings," *New Mexico Historical Review* 34 (January, 1959): 46; Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies* (1849; repr., Santa Barbara, California: The Narrative Press, 2001), 49; Davis, *El Gringo,* 276.

[148] Davis, *El Gringo,* 221-222; John L. Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Ciapas and Yucatan,* twelfth edition (1841; repr., New York: Harper & Brothers, 1858), 89.

[149] For more on bigamy in Spanish America, see: Boyer, *Lives of the Bigamists*.

concubine "wives," how were visitors to do so? Many American travelers must have been somewhat familiar with the complex institutions of concubinage in the South and prostitution in the North, but only in Indian societies had these practices seemed so open as in Spanish America. Such comparisons seemed again to affirm a racial connection.

Many Anglo men seemed to treat Spanish American marriage like Indian marriage: something temporarily convenient that could be abandoned whenever they chose. "What whiteman was ever long constant to his Indian nymph, or Mexican muchacha?" Lewis Gerrard wrote in his travelogue of prairie travel.[150] Official records seem to confirm the statement: thirty percent of the recorded Mexican-Anglo unions that occurred in New Mexico's Rio Arriba between 1821 and 1846 involved men who, as Rebecca Craver commented in her analysis of the statistics, "apparently ventured into the Rio Arriba with no intention other than to reap whatever benefits the area had to offer and then leave." They are recorded as abandoning their spouses soon after marriage, or after the birth of a child, whether with their legitimate wife or an unmarried lover.[151]

Yet, as was the case for Antonia Luna and Nicolasa, Spanish American women also had a history of abandoning white men when a relationship grew inconvenient. Furthermore, many reports failed to take into account the significant number of very real, binding marriages that *did* endure between Anglo men and Spanish American women. While relationships that mirror those with Indian "wives" and black concubines were certainly common, openly discussed, and actively sought, Spanish American women break the pattern evidenced in previous chapters by successfully, legally marrying white men and even achieving a measure of acceptance in white, American society. Various economic, social, political, and racial factors played into American men's decision to openly contract official marriage with certain, usually elite Spanish American women.

Firstly, marriage to a Spanish American woman was often extremely economically advantageous. Just as many trappers and traders proved willing to contract marriages with Indian women in order to benefit from the trade and protection of their kin and tribe, so adoption into a Spanish American family often opened the door to a host of new economic opportunities. A man who married a Mexican woman—as long as the ceremony was official, and the man converted to Catholicism—was given Mexican citizenship, exemption from certain trade restrictions, legal sanction for fur trading, election to local political office, and business expansion through kin networks. Furthermore, Mexican laws established on the assumption that women were weaker than men and therefore needed to be economically protected ensured that daughters and sons received equal inheritance amounts, and that widows received a portion of their husband's estate.[152] A new wife could therefore bring her American husband vast amounts of property, wealth, and status.

Intermarriages between white Americans or Europeans and elite Mexican women in the borderlands were extremely common. Jane Dysart's examination of civil marriage records in San Antonio, Texas between 1837 and 1860 show the prevalence of unions between elite women and Anglo men. Almost half of all Anglo-Mexican unions involved women of the upper class, a striking statistic given the small percentage of wealthy families in the regions. In fact, at least one daughter from every "*rico*" family in San Antonio married an Anglo. After Texas

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[150] Garrard, *Wah-to-Yah*, 274.
[151] Craver, *The Impact of Intimacy*, p 25.
[152] Craver, *The Impact of Intimacy*, 1—4; Valerio-Jiménez, "'Indios bárbaros," 116.

independence in 1836, marriages became even more advantageous for both parties: upper-class *Tejanos* could benefit from an American's political influence, and an American could benefit from a *Tejano* family's landed wealth. For example, one elite San Antonio man, José Antonio Navarro, married his daughter to the state's adjunct general, while the two wealthy De la Garza sisters married the county clerk and the sheriff. An American politician who possessed a Mexican family could, moreover, mobilize the considerable Mexican vote. Dysart shows that in San Antonio in the 1840s and 50s, American men with Mexican families were consistently elected to city office.[153]

Albert Hurtado demonstrates a similar pattern in California. After Mexico won its independence in 1820, the missions were secularized and their lands given to individual *rancheros.* Such a sudden transfer created an elite that was, as Hurtado writes, "land and cattle rich but money poor." The daughters of this class were exceptionally marriageable, since union with an Anglo could provide the capital and trading connections a *Californio* family required, while providing an enterprising Anglo with vast property and political influence.[154] In her analysis of pre-Gold Rush California, Deborah Moreno argues that nearly all of the intercultural marriages during California's Mexican period from 1822 to 1846 were between foreign traders and elite, propertied women.[155]

Another reason Anglo men contracted legitimate marriages with Spanish American women was because they accepted certain racial claims. As previously noted, the Mexican frontier allowed members of almost every racial and social caste to "pass" into another, and propertied, elite *Californios, Tejanos,* and *Nuevo Mexicanos* were very notably class-conscious. They conveniently bleached their racial lineage, claiming direct descent from Spanish colonists, and remaining particularly careful to associate only with the highest, whitest social strata.[156] In his memoir *Sixty Years in California,* William Heath Davis remembered that "among the Californios there was more or less caste, and the wealthier families were somewhat aristocratic and did not associate freely with the humbler classes." The Prussian geographer Alexander von Humboldt wrote that the inhabitants of the Mexican frontier region *Nueva Viscaya* "are [all] white or at least they consider themselves as such. All believe they have the right to take the title of *don*," the honorific title reserved for the white, Spanish upper class.[157]

Of course, most Americans who knew anything of Mexican history and racial legacy were aware that many of these claims were spurious, but, as evidenced by the prolific marriages that nonetheless took place, they seemed keen to accept a bleached racial lineage in exchange for land, wealth, and opportunities for social and political advantage. In many accounts, American writers referred to any Spanish American woman they particularly admired as "Spanish," even when her appearance and social class suggested otherwise. In fact, some Americans even began to argue that a healthy infusion of Anglo-Saxon blood was exactly what Spanish Americans needed to strengthen their race and civilization. Of course, true to their gendered notions of

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[153] Dysart, "Mexican Women in San Antonio," 370.
[154] Hurtado, *Intimate Frontiers,* 22-23.
[155] Moreno, "Here The Society is United," 3.
[156] Hurtado, *Intimate Frontiers,* 44.
[157] William Heath Davis, *Sixty Years in California: A History of Events and Life in California; Personal, Political and Military, Under the Mexican Regime; During the Quasi-Military Government of the Territory by the United States, and After the Admission of the State into the Union* (San Francisco: A.J. Leary, Publisher, 1889), 89.; Alexander Von Humboldt, *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Ormé and Brown, 1822), 2: 241.

miscegenation, all dialogue concerning ameliorative racial mixing focused on relations between white men and Spanish American women.

The topic was openly discussed during the Mexican-American War, when Americans began to consider the possibility of conquest by *marrying* into property and power rather than seizing it violently. After all, if such vast swaths of Mexican territory were to come under American ownership as the nation's "manifest destiny," the Mexican natives would somehow have to be assimilated into American society. One couldn't exactly argue that the Mexicans would simply "disappear" like the Indians; unlike the latter, the Mexicans seemed more populous, less likely to succumb to disease, and possessed of their own nation, centralized government, and infrastructure. The notion of intermarrying—or at least interbreeding—with Mexican *señoritas,* who had been sufficiently praised and romanticized to appear distinctly attractive to many Americans, seemed an ideal way to both absorb the Mexican lands and sap Mexican men of sexual and social power.[158] War correspondent Thomas Bangs Thorpe wrote in 1847 that, since the American takeover of Monterey, "'it seems . . . to be in the order of Providence, that these [Mexican] women, so justly to be admired, are to become wives and mothers of a better race." In November 1847, a writer for the *Democratic Review* suggested the United States retain an army of occupation in Mexico so as to ensure a "strong infusion of the American race," which "would impart energy and industry gradually to the indolent Mexicans." Although this writer was ambiguous about the way such an "infusion" would take place—whether in a vague, cultural way or in a direct, sexual way—the word itself connotes a physical process involving penetration and transfer. The writer continued, a bit more explicitly, to suggest that the American soldiers would, "as they were discharged, remain in the country"—the reader supposes for personal rather than altruistic reasons— "and, gradually infusing vigor into the race, regenerate the whole nation." An officer in William Walker's filibustering expedition into Nicaragua was far more blunt: even the Nicaraguan men, he asserted, knew that the future of their women lay in the arms of Americans. "[American] immigrants will marry our forlorn girls," a Nicaraguan official supposedly told him, "they will infuse a new spirit into the country, become a component part of the population, and in this way we look to the regeneration of Latin America."[159]

Intermarriages did not decrease after the successful American takeover of the northern Mexican borderlands: if anything, American law made them even easier to contract (and dissolve), and marriage records seem to show that intercultural unions were more sought after than ever before. In Texas, various Mexican laws had protected women from being seduced under the promise of marriage: the law of *esponsales,* for example, protected a woman from a false betrothal. Even if a third-party witness had not been present when the man gave his verbal promise, the woman was entitled to sue him. Another Mexican law allowed single women to sue for child support if their seducer had impregnated them after a false marriage promise. After the American takeover, Mexican women in Texas no longer had either of these rights. The numbers of unwed mothers dependent on their families went up significantly, and even married women

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[158] The quintessential work on the gendered dialogue of empire, and the notion of intermarriage as a form of imperialism, is Amy Greenberg's *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire,* which explores these themes in the context of American expansion into Latin America and the Pacific.

[159] Thomas Bangs Thorpe, *Our Army at Monterey* (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1847), 123; "Occupation of Mexico," *The United States Magazine, and Democratic Review,* November 1847, 388; Horace Bell, "Confessions of a Filibuster," *The Golden Era,* July 23, 1876.

lost many of the legal options they'd possessed to pursue errant husbands. On the other hand, it became easier for women to end a marriage, as far more lax divorce laws were passed. In fact, Texas developed a notorious reputation for having shockingly high divorce rates, at least for that time period. A so-called 'interstate divorce trade' developed as residents of other states moved to Texas for the sole purpose of getting a divorce—even though Texan law prohibited divorcées from obtaining large sums of alimony or child support payments.[160] Such evidence suggests that the changes were not simply due to a transfer of American cultural and legal norms onto Mexican society, since so many of these laws drastically differed from those of other American states. Instead, they suggest the desires of American men—who after all, were the primary lawmakers—to ensure that both premarital sex and divorce were easy. Considering the fact that intermarriages in Texas increased after the take-over, it also appears that these laws were enacted specifically with Mexican women in mind: they allowed American men far greater opportunities to obtain multiple sexual and marital partners with very few restrictions or punishments.

Of course, the increased rate of intermarriage in the borderlands after the American takeover cannot solely be attributed to the greater laxity of the legal system. As Omar Santiago Valerio-Jiménez explains in his analysis of intermarriages in Texas after 1848, a major reason for the unions between Anglo Americans and the Mexican-American upper class was still economic: because no unclaimed land existed in the new American territory, marriage to a Mexican woman was the primary way American men could obtain property. For Mexican-American families, union with an American promised both political power under a new regime, and a mode of protection in the tense, potentially rebellious atmosphere that followed the Texas Revolution and the Mexican-American War.[161]

The increased numbers of social balls and intercultural marriages in California suggest similar motivations. The Gold Rush, especially, seemed to link American and *Californio* families more closely together than ever before.[162] In 1918, one son of an intercultural marriage between a *Californio* mother and an Anglo father wrote that "Most of the Spanish girls married Americans during the gold days, and the same tendency has prevailed down to our times." This, he asserted, was due to the fact that the Mexican girls were "vivacious, witty, and everlastingly good-natured—qualities that have appealed strongly to the gringo's ideals." Such marriages were so prevalent that, he explained, "the old Californians themselves are disappearing, so far as names go, for such names are maintained chiefly by the male branch." Indeed, some Mexican men resisted the intrusion, feeling emasculated by the American newcomers and bitterly aware of Mexican women's preference for Anglo men. Tiburcio Vasquez, son of respected *Californio* parents, recalled that as a young man he had been "in the habit of attending balls and parties given by the native Californians, into which the Americans, then beginning to become numerous, would force themselves and shove the native born men aside, monopolizing the dance and the women." Explaining why he had in 1852 decided to turn "*bandido*"—in other words, to become an outlaw—he remembered "a spirit of hatred and revenge took possession of me. I had numerous fights . . . . I believed we were unjustly and wrongfully deprived of the *social rights* that belonged to us."[163]

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[160] Valerio-Jiménez, "Indios bárbaros," 126, 364, 372-373, 383, 391.
[161] Ibid., 260.
[162] Moreno, "Here Society is United," 14.
[163] James H. Wilkins, "The Days of the Dons: Reminiscences of California's Oldest Native Son, Steve Richardson's Narrative, 1918," quoted in Ibid., 16; Tiburio Vasquez, quoted in Ibid., 16.

Spanish American men were not the only social group to feel threatened by the American taste for Spanish American women. White American women, too, noticed the obvious predilection many of "their" men had for the *señoritas*. After all, they, too, read the same travel narratives, periodicals, and literature as American men, heard the same gendered undertones of political discourse, and either heard, read, or saw firsthand the prevalence of intercultural unions. Certainly, publications about black or Indian "wives" or concubines were occasionally quite blunt about the benefits such non-white women provided over white ladies. Nonetheless, accounts of Spanish American women were by far the most explicit about such preferences, openly making comparisons between the women of the "warm" versus the "cold" climates and, perhaps most provocatively, hinting at the possibility of abandoning the latter entirely.

A man with a quadroon concubine could never legally marry her, nor officially present her to society. Similarly, though a man could legally marry an Indian woman, he could rarely bring her into white society with impunity. He could either visit her temporarily, while maintaining a certain status in white society, or spurn the trappings of white civilization entirely and live with her tribe. A man with a Spanish American wife, however, had far more options. For one thing, white society—at least in the borderlands—was far more welcoming to a "Spanish"-seeming wife than a black or Indian partner. For another, a white man with a Spanish American wife could choose to eschew American society completely, instead embracing hers. Spanish American society would most likely applaud the union; furthermore, unlike a move into Indian society, an Anglo man could retain the so-called "trappings of civilization" and all the political, economic, and social power that went with them. This, then, provided a whole new type of threat to white, American women: that of the so-called "Lotus Eaters," or the men who, as one travelogue writer explained, "married estimable [Spanish American] women, and became citizens of that country, . . . never return[ing] to their native land."[164]

"Frequently did I meet with countrymen whose love for their fatherland had become completely estranged by the fascinations of female society in Mexico"[165]

The Threat

"I did and do still take it upon me to affirm," Henry Augustus Wise wrote fervently of Guadalajara, "that no town in the universe can boast of so much female beauty." Wise was one of a good many American writers who declared themselves more impressed with the loveliness of Spanish American women than that of any other region in the world. "One must be blind, indeed, not to become something of a connoisseur in female beauty, after residing any length of time in Mexico," he wrote.[166]

Indeed, many Anglo writers began to openly contrast Spanish American women's exceptional charms with the traits of their own countrywomen—and to find the latter somewhat wanting. Although travelers did not openly admit an attraction to what they perceived as a more open and permissible sexual culture, they did mention a "warmth" and "ease" that made them loathe to return to strict, "stiff" Victorian norms. George Kendall, who, ironically, spent most of

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[164] James Carson Jamison, *With Walker in Nicaragua; or, Reminiscences of an Officer in the American Phalanx* (Columbia, MO: E.W. Stephens Publishing Company, 1909), 115-6. The term "Lotus-Eaters" refers to the Greek myth, mentioned by Homer, of an island where the native lotuses proved extremely intoxicating. Those who ate the flowers forgot everything about themselves and their past, living in languid, happy apathy.

[165] Kendall, *Narrative of the Santa Fé Expedition,* 2: 335-336.

[166] Wise, *Los Gringos*, 207.

his time in Mexico as a prisoner, nonetheless felt the need to explain the aspects of Mexican society that made it so desirable to many Americans and Europeans, particularly men.

Kendall found the "warmth" of Mexican society to be most clearly displayed by the Mexican custom of greeting with an embrace. When enjoyed with "the females of the country," he wrote, it "may be considered as one of the strongest of those ties which certainly bind the Americans and English to the land of Montezuma." It was, he explained, another facet of a certain "grace, an ease, a fascination, and a cordiality" among the Mexican women "which cannot be forgotten," causing "the cold and phlegmatic Anglo-Saxon, after a residence of some year or two in Mexico," to "leav[e] it with regret." An American or European, he wrote, specifying *male* visitors, "reflects upon the stiffness and restraint imposed upon the actions of his fair countrywomen by cold, conventional rules," and remembers with disdain "the distant bow, the formal shake of the hand, with which he will be greeted on his return." Contrasting these icy formalities "with his daily salutations from the dark-eyed daughters of the sunny land in which he is sojourning," Kendall insisted that American and European men were always "in favour of the latter."[167]

In fact, Kendall continued, many men found it impossible to leave the embrace of such a generous culture. "Frequently did I meet with countrymen whose love for their fatherland had become completely estranged by the fascinations of female society in Mexico," he claimed. Perhaps referring to both travel narratives and personal acquaintances, he asserted that "the women of that country, when married to any of the Anglo-Saxon race, have the reputation of making the best and most affectionate wives." As though to buttress his own desire to return with solid evidence of female lures, he alleged that "scattered through Mexico may be found innumerable instances where foreigners, induced by no other motives than the superior charms and excellent domestic endowments of the women, have settled permanently and are rearing families." Such a claim seems to deny the possibility that such marriages were motivated by the aforementioned economic, social, or political advantages; to Kendall, the real interracial attraction truly lay in the women's innate virtues, rather than any imperialistic designs.[168]

Kendall's narrative was quite obviously addressed to men; the pronoun assigned to the reader, or any other hypothetical visitor to Mexico, was always "he," and it was *men* who, he explained, had the greatest attraction to and difficulty leaving the exotic country. Although my own focus centers on male writers and readers in order to most directly gauge American men's racial and sexual perspectives, one female writer in particular must be noted. Frances Calderón de la Barca was a Scottish-born woman who moved with her family to Boston, where she met the Spanish diplomat Ángel Calderón de la Barca y Belgrano. She married him in 1838 and moved to Mexico, where she lived until 1842. While very few Anglo women journeyed to the borderlands or Spanish America and even fewer wrote about their experiences, Calderón's memoir *Life in Mexico,* published in 1843, was extremely popular. The book was actually a compilation of notes that Calderón had sent William Hickling Prescott for use in his famous *History of the Conquest of Mexico,* since the author himself never actually visited the country. Prescott considered her notes so well-written that he encouraged her to publish them separately.[169] According to the records of the New York Society Library from 1847 to 1856,

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[167] Kendall, *Narrative of the Santa Fé Expedition,* 2: 335.
[168] Ibid., 2: 335—336.
[169] "Frances Calderón de la Barca," Gendering Latin American Independence, The University of Nottingham, http://www.genderlatam.org.uk/PersonDetails.php?PeopleID=15.

Prescott and Calderón's works on Mexico were two of the most popular books checked out by male patrons. While female patrons certainly read them as well, they seem to have catered to a particularly *male* taste for Spanish American-centered literature.[170]

Calderón's work is especially striking for its generally flattering depictions of Mexican women, and for its blunt statements about the ways they were superior to Anglo women. In fact, her memoir occasionally sounds very much like Kendall's, except that it was written half a decade earlier and contrasted the "warm" *señoritas* to "cold" British rather than American women. Nonetheless, since British people were still considered "Anglo Saxon," and as Americans in the 19th century felt a very close racial, historical, and cultural tie to Britain, one can assume that many American readers would have assumed Calderón's designation "British" to often apply to themselves as well. Although Calderón did detail some negative aspects of Mexican femininity (pointing out dirtiness, dark skins, repellent or "masculine" habits like smoking, and a dismal lack of education) she nonetheless spent much of her narrative praising their manifold virtues and declaring them ideal partners for Anglo men. "There are no women more affectionate in their manners than those of Mexico," she averred. "In fact," she continued, any foreigner, "especially if he be an Englishman" who was "accustomed to the coldness of his fair countrywomen," needed only to "live a few years here. . to find the Mexican Señoritas perfectly irresistible." Like Kendall, she asserted that significant evidence supported the validity of her statement, "judged by the many instances of Englishmen married to the women of this country, who *invariably* make them excellent wives." In fact, she continued, it was somewhat necessary that such men forsake their home countries to become what a later writer termed a "Lotus Eater." "When an Englishman marries here, he ought to settle here," she opined, "for it is very rare that a *Mexicaine* can live out of her own country." Otherwise, Calderón claimed, a Mexican woman would pine away longing for "the climate— . . . that warmth of manner, that universal cordiality . . . the *laissez-aller* and absence of all etiquette in habits, toilette, etc." Such language suggests that the woman would not be alone in this yearning; after a while, both she and her English husband would "feel like exiles from paradise."[171]

Calderón's statements are somewhat validated by the fact that hers was the memoir of a woman. Perhaps this is partly why the work was so popular: besides illuminating a mysterious, exotic land and culture for American readers, it provided a female's confirmation of fantasies about Mexican women, suggesting a truth that existed beyond the desperate imaginations of male authors and audiences. After all, Calderón could provide a relatively impartial portrait, having both married a foreigner and settled in Mexico. Her first-hand knowledge might therefore be more reliable—and untainted by any sense of a threat—than that of a white, unmarried, female visitor. In fact, parts of her narrative so flattered Mexican women that a modern reader might suspect Calderón of the design to lure more of her countrymen to the "paradise" of willing ex-patriots.

According to a book extensively quoted by Calderón, the *Calendario de las Señoritas Mejicanas,* Mexican ladies were, quite simply, the epitome of femininity. While they were "not so white as the Europeans, . . . their whiteness is often more agreeable to our eyes"—"our" apparently referring to men in general. The *señoritas'* words were "soft, leading our hearts by gentleness," and their song "magic" that no one could resist. As for their bodies, that of a child was "not more sensitive, nor a rose-bud softer." Of their souls, the *Calendario* claimed that "in

[170] Zboray, "Reading Patterns in Antebellum America," 310.
[171] Calderón de la Barca, *Life in Mexico,* 1: 346-347.

Europe the minds are more cultivated, but in Mexico the hearts are more amiable. Here they are not only sentimental, but tender; not only soft, but virtuous." In Mexico, there existed "souls as beautiful as the borders of the rainbow, and purer than the drops off dew." As for their famous "passions," they were "seldom tempestuous, and even then they are kindled and extinguished easily," generally emitting "a peaceful light, like the morning star, Venus." As for their sexuality, the *Calendario* insisted that "modesty is painted in their eyes, and modesty is the greatest and most irresistible fascination of their souls." "In short," the *Calendario* ended, "the Mexican ladies, by their manifold virtues, are destined to serve as our support while we travel through the sad desert of life."[172]

The *Calendario* was written sometime in the 1830s by Maríano Galván Rivera, a Mexican man; in 1843, it was quoted by Calderón, and then at the pivotal moment of the Mexican-American War, it was re-quoted in a number of American publications.[173] By the mid-1840s, then, American literary audiences were indulging their imaginations with descriptions of Mexican women that had originated among Mexican men but had been confirmed by Anglo men *and* women. In other words, many American audiences proved willing to accept Mexico's own ideal of "true womanhood," and to therefore bypass any racial disincentives. Variations of the ideal *señorita* described by Galván reappeared time and again in American and European travel literature. She eventually became such a stock figure in the American mind that she was recreated—as exactly and repetitively as though carved into a woodcut and stamped onto pages—in American fiction. There, she outshone even the tragic mulatta and Indian princess, being sufficiently suited for legal marriages, "civilized" white society, and a perfectly happy ending of assimilation and national union.

[172] Calderón de la Barca, *Life in Mexico,* 1: 343-344

[173] These include: "Female Education in Mexico," *The Practical Educator, Vol I, and Journal of Health, Vol. II,* ed. W.M. Cornell (Boston: Published by the Editor, 1847), 285 and Samuel *Gregory's History of Mexico* (Boston: F. Gleason, 1847), 99.

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"My Heroine of Extremes"[1]
The Fiery *Señorita* in Antebellum Literature

Prior to the nineteenth century, Anglo literature about Spanish America was virtually non-existent. Then, in the 1840s, a rising genre of southwestern literature[2] emerged that fit into what *Blackwood's Magazine* called the "literature of the forest and the prairie, of the Indian camp and the backwoods settlement." This frontier fiction fascinated Americans with the wildness of its scenery and its characters. In the borderlands, the laws of civilization binding men and women into particular racial and class strata seemed to disintegrate. As one of the new genre's writers, Charles Wilkins Webber, wrote

> Events now taking place in the region of Texas and Mexico [and] the strange mixture of wild Indians, Mexicans, negroes, half-breeds, Spaniards, and Americans, inhabiting that region . . . form a field, at this time, of equal attraction to the sketcher and interest to the American reader.[3]

The Mexican-American War coincided with the rise of the novelette, an early form of pulp fiction with sensationalist plots and exotic settings that was published on cheap, yellow paper in pamphlets or magazine serials. Rarely bound into actual books intended for libraries, novelettes circulated widely among a mass audience by being passed around like periodicals. Although associated with the working-class because of their affordability and sensationalism, novelettes appealed to readers of all classes; their intention was to profit from mass appeal. Soldiers, especially, bought them in large quantities and toted them around borderland camps. Partly because they knew this military market was especially promising, and partly because the general American public increasingly demanded stories about a region that was swiftly becoming a national obsession, many publishers and authors focused their novelettes on Mexico and the war.[4] The main characters, furthermore, were usually young soldiers who ascribed to the culture of "aggressive masculinity." St. James, the protagonist of Newton Curtis' novelette *The Vidette: or, The Girl of the Robber's Pass: a Tale of the Mexican War* was born into a wealthy, respectable New England family but possesses a "rash and impetuous daring," an "imperious

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[1] The title of this chapter refers to a quote in Captain Mayne Reid's *The Rifle Rangers.* Henry Haller, the white hero, proclaims that his heart "recognized" the beautiful *señorita* Guadaulpe as "*the heroine of extremes,"* with a "nature gifted with all the tenderness that belongs to the angel ideal [of] woman; yet soaring above her sex in the paralyzing moments of peril and despair." Captain Mayne Reid, *The Rifle-Rangers: or, Adventures in South Mexico* (London: W. Kent and Co, 1857), 114.

[2] This term will be repeatedly used in this work to connote literature set in the Southwest borderlands and Spanish America, rather than literature created by Southwesterners. Though a number of authors had lived in or at least visited that region, most works were written, published, and disseminated on the East Coast of the United States, especially in the North.

[3] *Blackwoods Magazine* and Charles Wilkins Webber quoted in Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas,* 184.

[4] As proof of the variety of classes reading novelettes, Johannsen gives the example of a traveler on the western railroad in 1847 who was appalled to see the books "devoured by . . . numbers of well dressed and sensible looking ladies and gentlemen." Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas,* 184-87.

determination," a "feeling and generous soul" and an "ardent desire for distinction."[5] Such a description perfectly fit the masculine prototype of an anti-Victorian philosophy.

George Lippard, one of the most popular sensationalist writers of the period, directly addressed a particular type of reader in his own, brief soliloquy at the beginning of *Legends of Mexico*. "It is a glorious thing to see the glare of battle, enfolding you like a curtain," he celebrated, "to hear its thunder, yelling like the earthquake from the volcano's throat." It was marvelous, he continued, to "ride through the fury of a battle, at dead of night, a black steed bounding beneath you, while a beautiful woman quivers in your arms—it makes the heart swell and the blood burn like a flame!"[6] Clearly, Lippard assumed that his audience shared in a culture that promoted martial masculinity. Though very few would have personally experienced the scene he described, Lippard nonetheless assumed they could share the fantasy and agree that the romance of it all made "the heart swell and the blood burn"—especially if they were avid readers of his genre of literature.

If a story about Mexico was to be popular, Lippard understood, it needed to place a beautiful, quivering woman in the hero's arms. Since the borderlands possessed few white women, and since Spanish American women held a growing fascination for both readers of contemporary travel literature and those with imperial designs, the main female character was almost always a *señorita.* In fact, the heroine was usually the book's primary lure: though the male protagonist was usually the main character, the *señorita* possessed the title itself. The overwhelming majority of southwestern fiction published in the 1840s featured a beautiful Spanish American heroine in their titles.[7]

The defining feature of virtually all fictional literature about Spanish America published at this time was a love affair between the American hero and a Spanish American woman. In fact, many books didn't limit themselves to a single romance; they paired almost all of their most admirable American characters to beautiful *señoritas,* ending their stories with multiple intermarriages. According to Shelly Streeby in her analysis of antebellum sensationalist literature, these romances—usually between U.S. soldiers and elite Mexican women during the war—represented a benign form of imperial conquest. These novelettes therefore echoed the calls of public figures, politicians, and writers of travelogues and periodicals to "whiten" Spanish America through peaceful, international sexual union.[8] Indeed, the travel literature of the 1830s and 40s fed the stereotypes that constructed the fictional literature—and, in turn, fictional representations seem to have influenced subsequent travel writings. Love stories about the Mexican-American War very likely inspired many soldiers, themselves avid readers, to seek out relations with Mexican women. Reports of such numerous romances consequently trickled East to feed the imaginations of authors and publishers.

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[5] Newton Curtis, *The Vidette; or, The Girl of the Robber's Pass: A Tale of the Mexican War* **(**New York: Williams Brothers, 1848), 12-13.

[6] George Lippard, *Legends of Mexico* (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson, 1847), 33.

[7] A few of the most popular include: *Inez the Beautiful: or, Love on the Rio Grande* (1846); *The Heroine of Tampico; or, Wildfire the Wanderer* (1847); *The Warrior Queen: or, the Buccaneer of the Brazos* (1848); *The Vidette: or, the Girl of the Robber's Pass* (1848)*; The Volunteer: or, The Maid of Monterey* (1847)*; Magdalena, the Beautiful Mexican Maid: a Story of Buena Vista* (1846); *The Mexican Ranchero: or, the Maid of the Chapparal (1847), The Mariner of the Mines; or, the Maid of the Monastery; The Prisoner of Perote: A Tale of American Valor and Mexican Love; The Hunted Chief: or, the Female Ranchero (1847)* These include several of the books I will be analyzing, as well as a few more listed in Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas,* 188-189.

[8] Streeby, *American Sensations,* 64-65.

Like the fictional literature surrounding the "tragic mulatta" and "Pocahontas figures," the basic plot of southwestern literature was very formulaic. Most often, it took place in Mexico during the Mexican-American War. The usual formula went like this: A handsome, brave American (usually a soldier) from a wealthy, respectable background, lusts after adventure and glory. Venturing into Mexican territory, he invariably falls for an exceptionally gorgeous Mexican woman who almost always belongs to the elite class: her father is usually a Spanish nobleman, and her mother—often dead—is either proclaimed to have been the descendent of Aztec royalty or is relatively ignored as a racial ambiguity. Their love is sudden, inevitable, and extreme, and often causes the *señorita* an agony of soul-searching as she is forced to choose between patriotic and erotic love. The internal conflict is exacerbated by the fact that she, herself, is often so brave and passionate that she cross-dresses and fights for her country, though she always makes sure to heroically rescue her American lover—Pocahontas-style— when he is captured by her countrymen. Unfailingly feminine even when raging with a sword upon the battlefield, she is also usually pursued by an immoral, revolting Mexican man (often a corrupt, aristocratic officer) whom her weak father demands she marry. Almost always, the story ends happily: the American war victory solves all crises by ending the *señorita's* internal conflict, slipping her back into feminine clothing, confiscating her weapons, and convincing her father that marriage to a conquering hero is preferable to one with a weak, defeated Mexican. The couple easily and often travels between Mexico and the United States, spending different parts of the year in each region to tend to their estates, and being equally welcomed by American and Mexican society.

Both Shelley Streeby and Amy Greenberg argue in their respective analyses of this fictional genre that the pairing of Mexican women with American men was supposed to suggest the naturalness and ease by which the United States could conquer Mexico. The stories promised that Mexican women were perfect partners for the virile, aggressive types of American men who entered their lands as conquering heroes. They insisted that Mexican men were weak and corrupt, and that Mexican fathers desired the advantages of American influence. The stories emphasized the ease by which the two lovers could move between regions, societies, and cultures, suggesting the natural way Mexico could be incorporated into the union itself. As for the potentially troubling themes of mixed races and crossed genders, Streeby and Greenberg argue that American imperialism was portrayed as a kind of panacea: the Mexican women were always stressed as *white*, and their union with American men was meant to continue the process of racial purification. Furthermore, both scholars explain, the literature insisted that Mexican women cross-dressed and fought only because they could not trust their own, weak, lazy men to do so. As soon as they married their American soldiers at the end of each story, the *señoritas* abandoned their militant, masculine identities and became meek, submissive, doting wives.[9]

Yet while Streeby and Greenberg insist that whiteness—or at least direct descent from Spanish nobility—was emphatically stressed, my own analysis of the literature suggests a more complicated situation. While almost all the heroines were indeed wealthy and of noble blood, possessing an aristocratic Spanish father, many were also of Aztec descent. Authors were very careful to avoid any mention of African blood, but a good many seemed to glory in an Aztec ancestor. In the same way that beautiful Indian women were perpetually presented as princesses

[9] See: Streeby, *American Sensations*, 64, 116, 118—124, and specifically Part Two, "Foreign Bodies and International Race Romance in the Story Papers; Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood*, specifically Chapter Three, "American Men Abroad."

in American frontier literature, Mexican heroines were of mixed royal and noble blood: noble from their Spanish lineage, and royal from their Aztec. Furthermore, a *señorita's* darkness—her dusky skin and black hair and eyes—was explicitly described as the very quality that made her so exceptionally lovely. Although the mixed-race heroines were never portrayed as particularly dark-skinned, they were certainly not white. Instead, like the tragic mulattas and Indian princesses, they possessed a perfect, intermediary coloring that reflected their ideal mix of "white" and "dark" traits: elegance, virtuous comportment, civilized accomplishments, submissiveness, and obedience combined with passion, sexual allure, militant bravery, and ardent devotion.

The ease and necessity of North American imperialism in Spanish America certainly seems to be the primary theme of this literary genre. Yet Streeby and Greenberg fail to take into account the more subtle, underlying themes concerning the exotic, romantic portrayal of mixed-race women, as well as their triumph over whiter women. The motive of imperialism did not simply *create* this genre of interracial romance: southwestern frontier fiction built upon a pre-existing, popular and prevalent theme in American literature. The brave and passionate *señorita* took her place in the literary canon alongside the wild and free "Pocahontas figure" and the doting, long-suffering "tragic mulatta." All three figures proliferated simultaneously, though the latter two had established themselves several decades earlier. I argue that the theme of imperialism simply created a different setting, plot, and ending for interracial romances. Whereas stories featuring beautiful Indian and quadroon lovers tended to take place in a safely distant past, or to end tragically, those featuring Spanish American heroines usually had contemporary settings, happy endings, and explicit miscegenation. Humanitarian ideals like abolition, assimilation, and the desire to save both the black and Indian races from slavery or extermination by "whitening" them were generally seen as socially radical. Successful intermarriage was therefore a difficult, rare theme for most American writers. American imperialism, on the other hand, was quite socially popular. By presenting intermarriage as a means by which America could fulfill its "manifest destiny," authors were able to present patriotic, advantageous, and racially ameliorative reasons for interracial romance.

In fact, just as with frontier and southern fiction, stories featuring Spanish American women usually emphasized the frailty and emptiness of the white female characters. Likely inspired by travel narratives' enchanted descriptions of "racial rainbows," many of the stories introduced a panoply of women of different races. While the primary heroine and love interest was generally mixed-race, she often possessed an Indian servant or lower-class friend, as well as a white sister, relative, or close friend. The white females were generally identified either as Anglos or as particularly fair-skinned, blue-eyed, blond Mexicans. Although a few stories did portray the darker women as sultry, dangerous temptresses and the lighter women as virtuous paragons, the vast majority made the former their heroine.[10] The dark-skinned *señorita,* just like the Indian princess and the tragic mulatta, was almost always far more brave, passionate, and admired than the white female characters. She, like Cooper's quadroon Cora or his Haitian princess Ozema, appeared more worthy of the white hero's love than feeble white characters like

[10] Two examples of stories that featured evil "dark" women were Ned Buntline, *Bellamira; or, The last days of Callao, an Historical Romance of Peru* (Boston: n.p, 1847), and Harry Halyard, *The Mexican Spy, or, The Bride of Buena Vista: a Tale of the Mexican War* (Boston: F. Gleason, 1848). Nevertheless, Buntline's "dark" lady is far more passionate and interesting than his rather insipid white character, and Halyard's Corita is the only evil, dark Mexican woman in the book. All the other *señoritas,* be they dark or light, are exceptionally kind and virtuous.

Alice or Mercedes. Yet while Indians and quadroons were often tragically cast aside for white women, most Spanish American-themed literature insisted that the *señoritas* captured the American heroes' hearts instantly and eternally.

Very few books in the latter genre presented the love triangles and romantic competitions between white and dark ladies that were so popular in other types of American fiction. Instead, the whiter female characters occasionally died—too pure or weak for such a harsh world—but were more often happily married off to some secondary American character. Interestingly, the literature produced around the time of the Mexican-American War occasionally allowed the full-blooded Indian character the same fate. In a number of stories, the heroine's beautiful, loyal, brave Indian companion won the heart of one of the hero's fellow soldiers. Of course, the Indian women themselves were always extraordinarily beautiful, light-skinned, courageous, and passionate—exactly like the Indian princesses of frontier fiction. Furthermore, in the context of the overall theme of a peaceful marriage between Mexico and the United States, they were permitted the interracial marriages so often denied in most other literary genres.

It seems, therefore, that besides fulfilling American fantasies of immediate, eternal, and peaceful union with Spanish American nations, this new genre of international romance also catered to fantasies of interracial sex. In this way, it fit neatly into an established American literary pattern that seems to have constructed imaginary solutions to the "crisis of femininity." It presented the romanticized possibility of escape from a strict American society to one that offered opportunities for glory, heroism, chivalry, immense wealth, and aristocratic title. Although Streeby claims that all the cross-dressing warrior-women immediately shed their masculine attributes when they consented to marry their American lovers, I argue that such qualities were a primary aspect of their allure. To men who possessed a "rash and impetuous daring," an "ardent desire for distinction" and for the kind of excitement that made "the heart swell and the blood burn," a fiercely patriotic, courageous, bayonet-wielding woman may have appeared far more alluring—and suited to a military or frontier lifestyle—than a demure, white Victorian lady. [11]

The fact that the Spanish American genre featured contemporary settings and happy endings made the *señorita* more threatening to American white women than, say, the last princess of a disappearing Indian race, or a tragic mulatta doomed to suicide, slavery, or social exile. Even more problematic, however, was the popularity of endings that promoted the theme of the "lotus-eaters"—those men who married Spanish American women and never returned to the States. In much of the literature, Spanish American lands were presented as magnificent Edens for North American men. At the end of Captain Mayne Reid's *The Rifle Rangers,* the hero—who is also the narrator—informs the reader that, since returning to the States with his Mexican bride Guadalupe, he has received a letter from a soldier friend who remained after marrying Guadalupe's sister. "You were a fool for leaving Mexico," the letter proclaimed, "and you'll never be half as happy anywhere else as I am here." "Reader," the author then asks, "do *you* want me to come back?"[12] The implicit threat in such plotlines (at least to American women) was that the reader, possibly a man with his own imperial designs on Mexican lands and women, would answer in the affirmative—and follow right along.

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[11] Curtis, *The Vidette*, 12-13. See also Streeby, *American Sensations,* 124.
[12] For "lotus eater" quote, see Jamison, *With Walker in Nicaragua*, 115-6. Reid, *The Rifle Rangers,* 418.

"[She was a] daughter of Montezuma, the descendant of a thousand kings; . . . a bride more noble than ever . . . before"[13]

The Daughters of Montezuma

Before the Mexican-American War created an ideal romantic setting for authors writing about Spanish America, Cortez's conquest of Montezuma's empire was an increasingly popular literary topic. Robert Montgomery Bird's *Calavar* and its sequal *The Infidel,* published in 1834 and 1835, were immensely popular. As an admiring Edgar Allen Poe explained, there was "so much romance" in the story of the Spanish conquest because it possessed "the charm of the most elaborate fiction" while bearing the "marks of general truth." It provided the perfect setting for America's own "age of chivalry," and Poe compared Bird to Sir Walter Scott and his works to the *Waverly Novels.*[14] Bird's works inspired a number of imitations, most notably Edward Maturin's *Montezuma: The Last of the Aztecs,* which the *New York Mirror* described as "a *sensation*" when it was published in 1845, and which was almost immediately turned into a successful play.[15]

These stories essentially set the precedent for the romanticization of Mexican women who claimed descent from Aztec elites. They also pointed to the historical precedent of interracial marriage in Mexico. Aztec princesses very closely mirrored the Indian princesses of American frontier fiction, and Malinche, the famous Indian woman who was Cortes' translator and lover, was often portrayed as a kind of Mexican Pocahontas. In Maturin's work, she is described as a "child of nature," and a "forest child." Clearly the female version of the "noble savage," she is "pure as the stream," with "lovely eyes open with that incredulous wonder, characteristic of those unpracticed alike in the ways of the world and the deceits of men." Besides possessing the usual childlike, sweetly wild traits of the "noble savage," she is also brave, combining the "delicate feature and soft expression incidental to her sex, with a boldness, increased by the roving and military life she led in the Spanish camp." Like Pocahontas, she has a "self-sacrificing spirit," and, when Cortes' life is threatened, "would willingly have taken her lover's place, and welcomed the blow to save him." Like the famous Virginian princess, Malinche, too, relinquishes her own racial ties to bind herself more securely to the whites: "Every passing day produced a fresh link between the Indian and her confederates," Maturin explains, and "her mind seemed to overleap or forget all distinctive features of nation, while her heart began to yearn to the Spaniard as to her own countryman."[16]

Unlike most American stories featuring Indian women and white men, Maturin's *Montezuma* celebrated the true love he claimed crossed racial boundaries. "Love regards not distinction of person or rank," Maturin's Cortes announces to Malinche."When the heart is fixed, it over-leaps all difference of grade and blood; all those tyrannical barriers society hath established . . . . Love levels all."[17] The happy ending of interracial marriage may have been

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[13] Robert Montgomery Bird, *The Infidel; or, The Fall of Mexico, in Two Volumes* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard, 1835), 2: 213, 228.

[14] Edgar Allen Poe, "The Conquest of Florida, by Hernando de Soto," *Southern Literary Messenger,* July, 1835, 647; Edgar Allen Poe, "Robert M. Bird" in *The Works of Edgar Allen Poe, Vol V & VI* (New York: Hearst's International Library Co., 1914), 59- 60.

[15] Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas,* 181-182.

[16] Maturin, *Montezuma: the Last of the Aztecs,* 1: 42, 101, 107, 169, 256; 2: 49, 78, 122.

[17] Ibid, 1: 175.

palatable for the same reasons Pocahontas's union with John Rolfe was celebrated in literature: because it was historically valid and safely within a distant past. Furthermore, Cortes was Spanish—a European race whose purity Americans questioned.

Nonetheless, many stories of the Spanish conquest seem to suggest that some of Mexican women's most alluring traits—their dark beauty, gentle dispositions, noble courage, and ardent love combined with humble loyalty—were imbued by their Indian blood. In *Montezuma the Serf,* the particularly prolific novelette writer J.H. Ingraham writes that the Aztec princess Eylla is "gentle as the dove in temper; fearless as the eagle of her house in spirit," and "as darkly beautiful as Lyn, the Angel of Flowers." Montezuma's sister, Fatziza, is "the loveliest virgin . . . in all the city of Mexico," and "as happy as a bird from morning till night." Maturin's Aztec princess Cholitla has a face "as eloquent in expressing the language of the heart, whether it be felt to darken or illume, as the summer landscape in reflecting from its bosom the passing pageant of sun, storm, or cloud." Besides her "matchless beauty," she possesses a "gentleness of heart" and a "benevolence of disposition to all." Her devotion to her Aztec warrior is so profound that she announces that "day hath . . . no light if he be not present, nor the heart a single moment it would care to live again." When he is, in fact, killed (ensuring, interestingly enough, that the only marriage in the book is between a Spanish man and an Indian woman), she becomes "a maniac" and swiftly dies of a broken heart.[18]

One of the very first famous stories about Mexico was also the first to present the plotline of a hero who opted for a darker woman. In Bird's *The Infidel*, the Spanish soldier Juan Lerma gently spurns the love of Magdalena, a beautiful Spanish woman, for that of Zelahualla, an Aztec princess. Bird's descriptions of both women incorporate some of the stereotypes Americans associated with Spanish and Indian women. Magdalena, the Spanish noblewoman, is "majestic," looking like a "statue" of a "divinity" with a face of "commanding dignity." She has a "complexion dark, yet not tawny," and therefore possesses the requisite "dark" characteristics: though she is blessed with an "extreme gentleness of disposition," her eyes can be "transformed at once into the brightest torches of passion." She is "valiant also, fearing nothing that walks under heaven or above the abyss."[19] When she fails to secure the love of Juan Lerma—who, in fact, turns out to be her brother—she throws herself into a fire rather than suffer the agony of forbidden, unrequited love. Zelahualla, on the other hand, is presented as more childlike, submissive, dependent and doting. Her figure is of "exquisite proportions," and her skin is "for her race, wonderfully fair." Her face is "so singularly sweet," with eyes "so lustrously mild and saintlike in expression" that "a sweeter impersonation of beauty both mental and corporeal, could scarcely be imagined." Her total devotion to her lover, moreover, makes her treat him more like a master than an equal. When requested to convert to Christianity, she simply relies "What my lord is, that will I be," and gives "such looks of confiding affection as belong to the unsophisticated child of nature." She will, she vows to Juan Lerma, be a Christian—*"Juan's* Christian"— and will "think of none but him."[20]

Bird's story ends with both Magdalena's sad death and Cortes' proud announcement of the marriage between the "daughter of Montezuma, the descendant of a thousand kings," and Lerma, "the Count of Castillejo." He congratulates the latter—his own nephew—for obtaining

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[18] J.H. Ingraham, *Montezuma the Serf, or, The Revolt of the Mexitili, A Tale of the Last Days of the Aztec Dynasty, in Two Volumes* (Boston: H.L. Williams, 1845), 1: 7; Maturin, *The Last of the Aztecs,* 1: 50, 52, 141; 2: 185.
[19] Bird, *The Infidel,* 1: 108-109, 112.
[20] Ibid., 2: 48-49, 53, 79.

"a bride more noble than ever entered it before," and Zelahualla succeeds in distinguishing herself among "the dames of Castille" when brought back to Spain.[21] The message therefore seems to have been that Aztec princesses—or their descendants in nineteenth-century Mexico—were fit brides for even the most elite families, and could easily conform to "civilized" society. Furthermore, even though the Spanish woman's death was apparently necessary for the realization of a happy interracial union, both she *and* Zelahualla were presented as the forebearers of modern, mixed-race Mexican women.

Although originally published in 1835, Bird's work enjoyed renewed popularity at the time of the Mexican-American War.[22] The *señoritas* in those stories certainly appear to be descended—in both a racial and literary context—from Bird's Zualhalla and Magdalena, Maturin's Malinche and Chotitla, and Ingraham's Eylla and Fatziza. According to the literary tradition these authors began, such mixed Spanish and Aztec blood was presented as a source of pride rather than a racial embarrassment. In fact, such women could make American men brides "more noble than ever . . . before."

"Read the volume of their contrasted loveliness. [One] with her warm, voluptuous bosom, and the rich brown cheek, shadowed by the raven hair . . . . The other, with the fair cheek, and snowy breast, and large eyes that remind you of the deep azure of a starry midnight, the hair that floats, in curls of chestnut brown."[23]

Dark and Light Ladies of the Racial Rainbow

George Lippard was an author known for pushing the limits of literary propriety, especially with his descriptions of buxom women in sexually compromising situations. Unsurprisingly, his works were extremely popular. His 1847 publication *Legends of Mexico* presents a heroine vaunted as the magnificent descendant of Spanish and Aztec bloodlines. She is "a voluptuous daughter of the land of the Aztec, with the old Castilian blood mingling in her veins with the blood of Montezuma." That "sad emperor," Lippard asserts, had been the ruler of a truly admirable race, "conquered by Fate, not by man." In fact, Lippard celebrates the fact that Montezuma's " blood still beat in the veins of his daughters, who were joined in marriage with the proudest of the Castilian nobility." In this way, miscegenation through the female line—since the *conquistadors* were men—is presented as a blend of the best traits of both the Indian and European races. Lippard therefore implies that his Mexican heroine Inez is perfectly suited to be the bride of his dashing American hero *because* she is of such distinguished mixed races. As such worthy *señoritas* intermarried with American men, Lippard explains, miscegenation would further improve them, ensuring that "the mongrel race, moulded of Indian and Spanish blood," would "melt into, and be ruled by, the Iron Race of the North."[24]

Inez is first introduced asleep in her chambers, where the reader is invited to gaze upon "her voluptuous form, couched on soft pillows." She has, Lippard asserts, "one of those wild, warm natures, born of the tempests and sunshine of the volcanic south," which is reflected in skin "a rich, clear brown" with a "fiery tinge," eyelashes "long and dark," long hair that flows in "a shower of midnight tresses," lips "ripe" and "warm," and a "bosom full and passionate." "Let

[21] Ibid., 2: 213, 228.
[22] Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas*, 181.
[23] Lippard, *Legends of Mexico*, 112.
[24] Ibid., 29, 15.

us approach her couch," Lippard urges the reader, inviting a closer look at a bosom which, agitated in some tempestuous dream, gives a "wild throb" that make her loose robe fall aside, revealing a "young breast, beating with violent emotion." The bosoms of Mexican *señoritas,* no matter their class, were supposed to be just like those of lovely Indians and quadroons: openly ogled by characters and readers alike, under the supposition that (as in the travel literature) they were freely, cheerfully bared to all who may desire a peek. In *Bellamira, or, the Last Days of Callao,* the author Ned Buntline actually calls the bosom of a beautiful Peruvian countess a "heaving pocket of love."[25]

Lippard goes so far as to describe a fully naked Mexican woman, veiling the voyeuristic impulse under the explanation that she is a poor, virgin victim of a brutal rape. "Naked as Eve before she fell," she has blood "streaming from her white bosom," though her dark race is made apparent with the description of an "olive cheek which pillowed the dark eyelashes." Her body has a "matchless outline" that is "chaste yet voluptuous," a "bosom, just blossoming into bloom" and lips that "death had not despoiled of their vermillion." Lippard again invites the reader to stare, insisting that "had you seen [her] . . . you would have knelt by her, and gazed for hours upon [her] silent beauty."[26] By presenting her body as a contradiction of voluptuousness despite decay, innocence despite violation, and chastity despite apparent promiscuity, he provides her with the alluring, stereotypical attributes of Mexican women and therefore allows the reader to admit an attraction to even the dead body of a *señorita.*

Almost all Spanish American heroines were presented as such contradictions: fully womanly despite their young age, demurely virtuous despite their bulging bosoms, and sweetly childlike and innocent despite their queenly deportments and fiery passions. Such a combination seems a kind of fusion of Bird's Magdalena and Zualhalla, of regal Spanish nobility and the Aztec "children of nature." In Buntline's *Magdalena, the Beautiful Mexican Maid,* the title character is only "of sweet seventeen," and yet has a form that is "full" and "perfectly proportioned," swelling out of a "low-necked dress." Her face bespeaks "a warm and enthusiastic heart," visible through her "large, beaming eye of jett blackness" and lips that are "full and rosy." With a Castillian father and a deceased, racially ambiguous mother, she has "cheeks which, though quite brunette," are "transparent as the rind of a pomegranate," and a disposition that is "gay and dashing." Buntline's Edwina, the heroine of *The Maid of Monterey,* is slightly more regal, a "tall, magnificent being" with a "queenly cast." She has "eyes black as night, a complexion brilliantly clear, though of the brunette hue," and "a glossy flood of jet-black curls on her graceful neck and shoulders." Isora in Charles Averill's *The Secret Service Ship* is a similar combination of nymph and queen: she is "radiant with all the beauty of Mexico's sunny southern clime" and "matchless in the perfections of the magnificent queenly figure," with a "superb black eye," "glossy waves of night-hued hair," and "rose-bud lip[s]." For all her stately magnificence, however, she has a "light spring that ravishingly displayed all the sylph-like graces of her peerless form."[27]

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[25] Ibid., 28-29; Buntline, *Bellamira,* 29.
[26] Lippard, *Legends of Mexico,* 39.
[27] Ned Buntline, *Magdalena, the Beautiful Mexican Maid: A Story of Buena Vista* (New York: Williams Brothers, 1846), 12; Ned Buntline, *The Volunteer: or, The Maid of Monterey, A Tale of the Mexican War* (Boston: F Gleason, 1847) , 19; Charles E Averill, *The Secret Service Ship; or, The Fall of San Juan D'Ulloa: A Thrilling Tale of the Mexican War* (Boston: F. Gleason, 1848), 12, 16.

In the very first American book to present a Mexican setting and heroine, Timothy Flint's *Francis Berrian,* the Spanish American woman is described as the "*beau ideal*" of her American lover's most romantic dreams. The *señorita* character would retain that status throughout the next few decades, as the genre became immensely popular. Furthermore, just as the title hero Francis Berrian preferred his raven-haired, black-eyed, "olive-toned" Mexican aristocrat to her lily-skinned, blond-haired, blue-eyed Dutch rival, so the vast majority of succeeding stories admitted a preference for the darker woman. In Reid's *The Rifle Rangers,* the American hero stumbles upon a paradisiacal scene of two sisters playing in the tranquil pool of a tropical garden. The elder sister, Guadalupe, has blood that "mantl[ed] darker" in her veins than in those of her sister, lending "an olive tinge" to her skin and an "admixture of purple" to the red of her cheeks and lips. Her eyes are "black, large, and almond-shaped," and her hair is also black, with "a dark shading upon the upper lip" that is, Reid admits, "a moustache, in fact, soft and silky as the tracery of a crayon." Her sister Luz, on the other hand, is "the type of a distinct class of beauty—the golden-haired blond." Her large, round eyes are "blue as turquoise," her long hair " a chastened yellow," and her skin "an effusion of roseate blushes" and "snowy whiteness" so pale that her arms seem almost "bloodless and transparent." Most likely, antebellum readers (if not modern audiences, as well) would have expected the American soldier to fall in love with the more classic, Anglo beauty—especially since the American hero points out such dark, even masculine qualities in the elder sister. Nonetheless, the soldier falls into immediate, profound love with the mustachioed Guadalupe. He even acknowledges the possibility that it is the very dark and exotic nature of her looks that makes her so alluring. One of his companions proclaims that she looks "for all the world like them bewtiful Crayoles of Dimmeray"—in other words, a quadroon—and the hero himself describes her looks as "wild, half-Indian, half-Arab."[28]

Interestingly, this was Reid's first book. Its popularity spurred him to write more, among which was *The Quadroon* (mentioned in Chapter Three), in which the main white hero falls in love with a quadroon slave instead of her gorgeous, wealthy white mistress. Clearly, Reid had found a racially radical formula for romance that seemed very popular with readers.

Most white women in the literature—whether fully Anglo or simply fairer, mixed-race Spanish Americans—were described in a similar way to Reid's Luz. While the darker women were queenly and their innocence nymph-like, the lighter women were rarely described as regal, sensuous, or playfully wild. They were, instead, sweet, child-like, and angelic, possessing "mystic," "delicate," and "sentimental" spirits rather than tempestuous, passionate natures. Azelia, the white woman in Buntline's *Bellamira,* is just such a heavenly ideal, with snowy looks inherited from a German mother. Her Spanish father, addicted to the hedonism and vices attributed to Mediterranean blood, despairs of ever acclimating her to the carefree, dissolute atmosphere of the Peruvian city in which they live. He explains that her Saxon blood has imbued her with "that spirit which is so opposed to all that makes life pleasant." In describing her, the narrator tells the reader to "fancy an angel from heaven," with eyes "pure and all holy in expression," and "features like those of a Venus modeled by the hand of chastity, in which all sign of voluptuousness was softened down into sweet purity." Azelia is, the narrator explains, "a being too pure, too soft, too entirely beautiful for this dark and vicious earth."[29] Like many of the white women in stories featuring Indian and quadroon heroines, Azelia seems almost more suited for a sublime, virgin death than a successful, loving marriage.

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[28] Flint, *Francis Berrian,* 1: 64, 65; 2: 121. Reid, *The Rifle Rangers,* 83, 84, 88, 99, 113-114.
[29] Buntline, *Bellamira,* 32, 26-27.

Many stories featuring Spanish American women found a great fascination in making the darker and lighter women sisters—just as many novels featuring "tragic mulattas" found a particularly titillating tragedy in making the quadroon and her white rival half-sisters. Most sisters in the southwestern genre, however, were presented as full-blooded siblings, suggesting again that fiction-writers were inspired by travelogues' descriptions of the racial rainbows that existed even within families. Thus Magdalena's sister Ximena in Buntline's *Magdalena, the Beautiful Mexican Maid* is presented very similarly to Reid's Luz. Unlike her dashing, dark, majestic sister, Ximena is "a delicate, fragile flower of humanity, a kind of fairy in appearance . . . small and delicately formed, more pale than [Magdalena] and so quiet and dreamy in her ways, that she gained among those who knew her the name of 'La Pensarosa,' or The Sentimental." While her sister's eyes are "flashing and bright," Ximena's are "soft, dewy, and soulful," and she is perpetually described as being "gentle" and "timid" while her sister is "wild and willful."[30]

A surprising number of stories failed to fully describe the lighter female characters. While many authors spent a good amount of time detailing the beautiful "brunette" qualities of the darker women, the lighter characters were often ignored. Martha, the Mexican woman in *Francis Berrian,* is described in almost exhaustive detail, so painfully gorgeous that the American hero falls instantly, desperately in love with her. Yet the Anglo-Saxon, Lutheran daughters of the hero's Dutch friend—in other words, the women most racially and religiously suited to the hero—are hardly described at all. Though Berrian announces that they were "undisputed belles and beauties," and though one is completely in love with him, his portrayal is short and rather ordinary. They have "round faces of the purest and most brilliant red and white," "flowing flaxen curls," "alabaster necks," and "mild and melting blue eyes." Though sweet, such a description seems slightly pathetic and oddly bovine. As for Harry Halyard's white, American Avaline in *The Heroine of Tampico*, she is only described as having "a fair form," a "sweet and placid smile," and the "natural freshness and blood of youth." Though she initially seems to be the protagonist (since she appears in the first scene and bears the story's title), she spends much of the book imprisoned in a convent. It is her loyal Indian handmaid, Azilca, who receives the most attention as she rushes around saving all the Americans. Azilca, moreover, receives a much more detailed description than Avaline: she is so "handsome," such a "lovely brunette" of "apparently not more than 15 years of age," possessing such "a pair of beautiful black eyes beaming forth from [a] lovely countenance" and with such a "soft, melodious tone of voice," that the American officer she meets immediately falls in love with her.[31]

Authors whose stories involved women of a variety of colors or races often gave in to a suggestive depiction of interracial, homoerotic love. Unsurprisingly, George Lippard provided one of the most blatantly sensuous of such scenes. During a battle scene in which their town is being bombarded by American troops, "two virgin forms"—the sisters Teresa and Ximena—grasp each other in a terrified embrace, "their half-naked forms quivering with affright." Lippard describes them as being burrowed in each other's bosoms, with faces "hidden on each other's breasts among their luxuriant hair." When a sudden crash causes them to lift their heads in shock, Lippard invites the reader to "read the volume of their contrasted loveliness." The darker sister, Ximena, has a "warm, voluptuous bosom," a "rich brown cheek," and "raven hair," while her sister Teresa possesses a "fair cheek," a "snowy breast," eyes that are " the deep azure of a starry

[30] Buntline, *Magdalena,* 30, 31, 57, 17.
[31] Flint, *Francis Berrian,* 1: 275, 158; Harry Halyard, *The Heroine of Tampico; or, Wildfire the Wanderer* (Boston: F. Gleason's Publishing Hall, 1852), 12, 37-38.

midnight," and floating "curls of chestnut brown." Like an artist describing his romantic painting, Lippard points out "their beautiful tresses twining together, in mingled dyes of light and shade, the full, luxuriant form of Ximena, contrasted with the more delicate figure of Teresa."[32]

When their father is fatally shot by an American soldier and comes staggering home to die in his daughters' arms, the two react in ways stereotypical of their racial descriptions. The dark, emotional, brave Ximena desperately tries to chafe his chilled palms, "her hair streaming wildly over her shoulders, stained with the warm blood of his heart." Meanwhile, her pale sister can only sit helplessly with his head in her lap, "her blue eyes weeping their tears like rain." In the thick of the melee, Teresa, her father, and her brother, who returns to the house after escaping the battle, become pitiful casualties: the father dies of his gunshot wound, and his children are felled by a single, stray bullet through both their skulls. Ximena, on the other hand, is luckier—or, Lippard seems to suggest, simply made out of stronger stuff. Lippard coaxes his reader to look for her among the corpses of her family, finding her with "eyes dilating" around "each burning pupil," her white, shocked face and "uncovered bosom" framed by the dark "volume of her luxuriant hair." Though almost "maddened," Lippard points out the "heaving of her white bosom" that revealed a "torn heart" that nonetheless "still throbbed on."[33]

In fact, the dark, passionate Ximena seems strangely suited for this violent upheaval, as though destined for a glorious future denied her fair, faint sister or her conquered father and brother. The young American soldier who killed her father is heartbroken by the scene he witnesses when he finds Ximena mourning her dead family. He falls head over heels for the gorgeous, tragic woman. Ximena, in turn, can apparently sideline her racial, national, and familial loyalty to accept his love, marry him, and accompany him to the United States. After all, she seems to acknowledge her lover's racial and national superiority, and is willingly absorbed into a new, American family. For their part, the soldier's family welcomes Ximena "as though she had been a gift, sent to them from Paradise." Rather than being shunned as a racial inferior, Ximena is therefore embraced as a treasured angel. Lippard ends his story by assuring his reader that American society enthusiastically welcomes the lovely girl, and that the "warm southern flower" grows ever more lovely in the embraces of her new people. As for the proud soldier, he gazes on his wife "with deep emotion," thinking of her as his "beautiful Trophy, from the battle-rent walls of Monterray."[34] Thus despite being a "gift" from "Paradise" treasured by a doting Yankee society, Ximena is fundamentally an exotic possession, a symbol of the racial and sexual victory of aggressive masculinity.

"Your sweet and gentle nature is probably far contrasted with the fearless and bold character of this Queen of the Banditti. . . . [You have] more of the gazelle than the lioness . . . more of the mild Venus than the wild Amazon"[35]

Contrasting Characters

The "wild," "warm," "bewitching," "fierce," and "intense" natures of the dark female characters were always emphasized from the very first pages of their introductions.[36] The title

[32] Lippard, *Legends of Mexico*, 112.
[33] Ibid., 114, 117.
[34] Ibid., 121.
[35] Averill, *The Secret Service Ship*, 36.
[36] Each quoted word refers to repeated adjectives used in most of the books analyzed in this chapter, most specifically those mentioned in the following two paragraphs.

character of Buntline's *Magdalena: The Beautiful Mexican Maid* has a face that "bespeaks a warm and enthusiastic heart," and her own father declares only five pages later that "she is wild and willful." When the American hero of Newton Curtis' *The Vidette* meets the marvelous *señorita* Xelima, he is "forcibly struck" not only with the "sweetness" of her features, but also "the sparkling, ever-changing, and always bewitching succession of smiles, emotions, and thoughts" that light up her face, and the hot flush that "the warm blood of her southern clime" causes to "rus[h] to her cheek and brow" when their eyes meet. As for the recklessly brave Isora, the heroine of Averill's *The Secret Service Ship,* the reader and the American hero first encounter her on the battlements of a fearsome castle, slashing at a violent pursuer with a dagger. She is "wild and frantic," "impetuous," moving like "lightening" in "frenzy's wildest energy" with a "fiercely flashing eye."[37]

Such extremes of passion and reckless abandon seem quite out of synch with the ideal of restrained, demure Victorian womanhood. Nonetheless, according to the American heroes, such displays of what can only be described as "aggressive femininity" were the primary reason these *señoritas* were so magnificent and irresistible. Henry Haller, the narrator and hero of Reid's *Rifle Rangers* declares that it is Guadalupe's "fierceness" and the "extremes" of her nature that make her his soul-mate. "There was something picturesque, something strange, something almost fierce, in her aspect," he writes, "and yet it was this indefinable something, this very fierceness, that had challenged my love." His own heart "recognized" her, he explains, because she is "*the heroine of extremes,"* a "nature gifted with all the tenderness that belongs to the angel ideal [of] woman; yet soaring above her sex in the paralyzing moments of peril and despair." He declares that she is the kind of woman who feels "the desperate intensity of one passion," who "knows no limit to . . . self sacrifice short of destruction and death." This kind of woman, he avers, may fall in love—"but *only once.*"[38]

Such a description very succinctly describes the ideal attributes of almost all darker-skinned heroines of nineteenth-century literature—quadroons, Indian princesses, or Spanish American *señoritas*. Haller therefore suggests that these are really the only kinds of women suited for true, manly American heroes. After all, by writing that they soar "above" their sex in the feverish intensity of their emotions, he implies that the spirited natures of such dark women are superior to those of the Victorian female prototype. His passion for Guadalupe, he explains, is all the more real and intense *because* her nature is such a remarkable combination of femininity and wildness. In other words, their love is true because neither of them are models of restrained Victorianism. "I must confess mine is not one of those curious natures that I have read of," Haller writes, likely referring to the painfully virtuous characters of Victorian sentimental or domestic fiction, "whose love is based only upon the goodness of the object." That, he states in disgust, "*is not love*."[39] The fact that Haller is a first person narrator, and that his name is very seldom used, suggests that his own views reflect those of the author himself. Such a statement therefore implicitly suggests the belief held by some antebellum men that real love could only occur between two ardent, sexual, unrestrained natures. In literature, and at least nominally in American culture, these usually belonged only to American men and non-white women.

Southwestern literature often faced the beautiful *señorita* with the paradox of being the bravest, most intelligent, and honorable representative of her country—and therefore superior to

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[37] Buntline, *Magdalena,* 12, 17; Curtis, *The Vidette,* 56; Averill, *The Secret Service Ship,* 12.
[38] Reid, *The Rifle Rangers,* 114.
[39] Ibid., 113—114. His italics.

virtually all the men. This usually translated into a plotline in which she was forced to defy a corrupt or inept father, priest, or politician, and staunchly refuse to marry an inferior man of her own nationality. After all, she had not only to prove herself an ideal match for the American hero, but also to ensure that readers would see her as a woman far more suited for North American than Spanish American citizenship. Her defiance, therefore, reflected the underlying theme of ameliorative miscegenation between superior *señoritas* and their ideal national and sexual partners: North American men.

In the very first novel of the southwestern genre, *Francis Berrian,* the Mexican heroine Martha fervently defends the title character, an American who rescued her from the Comanches, against insults from a corrupt priest and the arrogant nobleman who wishes to marry her. Though she is not yet in love with the American, this abuse infuriates her to such an extent that she draws herself up, looking "wild" with her "eyes glisten[ing]" and announces in a ringing voice "Now hear me all. . . . I have my father's spirit in me. Treat [the American] badly, and you will make me love him. I owe my father deference and obedience, but none of you can command the heart."[40] Indeed, she vows, if they drive him away, she will detest her noble suitor for the rest of her life and become a heretic rather than forgive the priest. Like Pocahontas, Martha therefore appears ready to abandon her loyalty to family, society, and religion rather than to injure a white man.

Some authors chose to make their *señoritas* almost fatally defiant, willing to brave violence and even death over coercion. Isora, the heroine of Averill's *Secret Service Ship,* screams in the face of the loathsome Mexican who attempts to kidnap her into marriage, "Sooner will I yield myself the bride of death!" She then yanks a dagger from her bosom and, shouting "perish the hand that stays me!" chops his hand off and prepares to leap off the castle walls. The title character of Buntline's *Magdalena, The Beautiful Mexican Maid,* proves similarly intractable. She vows to her father that she will commit suicide if she is forced to marry the vile Mexican colonel, Alfrede. Ignoring her vow that "before I will wed him . . . I will bury this dagger in my heart," her desperate, debt-ridden father forces her down the aisle of a church lined with armed soldiers. Face to face with her intended bridegroom, her passionate nature makes her form radiate brilliance and even grow in size: "Her face was flushed; her eyes were full and bright; her form seemed to dilate, and swell into perfection with the air of queenly dignity, which seemed to natural to her."[41] Rather than fainting or breaking into uncontrollable sobs (the usual recourse for fictional white women) the resourceful *señorita* grabs a weapon from one of the soldiers and uses it to dash Alfrede's own gun from his hands. At that very moment, the Texas Rangers storm the church to rescue her from an unnatural marriage and reunite her with her true love, the American Charles Brackett.

In order to communicate their intended message about international relations, however, authors could not allow *señoritas* to be fully self-sufficient; they could save themselves to a certain degree, but then they needed a well-timed *rapto* by their American lovers. Furthermore, rather than meekly obey their families or even plan a convenient swoon, Spanish American ladies—at least, those identified as "dark" women—were expected to ardently welcome the impassioned arms of their kidnapper/rescuer. True "heroines of extremes," their fierce anger was usually transformed into burning desire, and their bodies described as turning hot and flushing dark. Such a popular plot twist suggests authors' knowledge of the *raptos* described in

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[40] Flint, *Francis Berrian,* 1: 123.
[41] Averill, *The Secret Service Ship,* 11; Buntline, *Magdalena,* 37.

travelogues, as well the hearty appetite of the American literary public for such sexually adventurous scenes.

Buntline's Magdalena is rescued by her Texas Ranger right at the moment she dashes the weapon from her evil, would-be groom's hands. The American and his fellow Rangers storm the scene of her forced wedding and he leaps off of his horse to sweep her off her feet. In the heat of the moment he kisses her fervidly on the lips, but Magdalena does not shy away with maidenly reserve. Rather than "turn from him with cold mock modesty," she "return[s] both the embrace and the salute with an ardor," and gallops off to wed him immediately. A similar *rapto* occurs in Lippard's *Legends of Mexico.* When the beautiful Inez is confined to her room in preparation for a forced marriage to a Mexican the next day, her true husband, a Virginian soldier, rescues her. He clasps her half-clothed form to his "manly heart" and breaths into her ear "Come! . . . I have dared death to meet you, and we must dare death again, ere we escape from this place." He sweeps her into his arms, "clasping the waist which quivered in his embrace," and bears her down a ladder positioned against her balcony. The "blazing sky" lights up their faces as she clings to his breast, her olive cheek afire "with a burning blush of passion." The flames—either from the sky or her blazing cheeks—are so incandescent that even "her white robe and black hair are tinted with fiery gleams of scarlet."[42]

Just as common as scenes of *rapto,* however, were plotlines that allowed the *señorita* to dramatically fight in her own defense. Unlike the majority of white or otherwise light-skinned characters, almost all *señoritas* were granted the dramatic daring to brandish daggers, chop off hands, steal guns, and even cross-dress to fight alongside robber bands or the Mexican army. In fact, Shelly Streeby states that "the figure of the cross-dressed Mexican maid was a nearly standard plot device in the international race romances of 1846–1848." Such behavior was almost always lauded by author and characters alike, described as "heroic" or "noble" and adding to the *señorita's* allure. Streeby explains that this approval likely stemmed from the fact that such masculine behavior was "justified by patriotism, defense of the family, or heterosexual love."[43] Sure enough, every bayonet-brandishing *señorita* in the literature was always careful to explain that she only fought to defend Mexico or to rescue kidnapped lovers and family members. After all, the men of the country were always portrayed as far too inept to do so themselves.

Despite their popularity among readers, Streeby explains, "these international race romances must be interpreted in light of the strong probability that the gender-bending behavior of these heroines would be attributed to their exotic, foreign status as well as to a perceived crisis in Mexican nationality."[44] This analysis, however, seems to overlook the very blatant admiration lavished on the fierce *señoritas* by authors and characters alike. Indeed, such dauntless courage and determination often caused the American heroes to fall even more deeply in love with the

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[42] Buntline, *Magdalena,* 44; Lippard, *Legends of Mexico,* 31-32.

[43] Streeby, *American Sensations,* 118, 119.

[44] Ibid., 119. When white women in literature possessed a "fighting spirit" or cross-dressed, they were almost always either low-class or prostitutes. Often, they were first sexually degraded and then turned to cross-dressing: in the popular *Female Marine* series (1815—18), the protagonist becomes a soldier to escape prostitution. Other times, they were virgins but low-class; the title character of *Fanny Campbell: The Female Pirate Captain: Tale of the Revolution* (1844), for example, cross-dressed as a pirate to rescue her lover. The Spanish American women who did so, however, were almost invariable of the upper classes, and most fought first for their countries or families and then for their white lovers. For more on white cross-dressing characters, see: Andrew Monnickendam, *Dressing Up for War: Transformations of Gender and Genre in the Discourse and Literature of War* (New York: Rodopi, 2001).

women. Rather than being portrayed as exotic exceptions to the feminine ideal, women with a fighting spirit were presented as specifically appealing to the kind of men who made their living in the harsh borderlands. Like courageous Indian women lauded as excellent archers and riders, Spanish American women with handy daggers and steady trigger fingers were presented as ideal partners for a wild, adventurous lifestyle. Their "gender-bending behavior" could therefore certainly be attributed to their "exotic" status and dark blood, but it was not specifically Mexican. Such conduct was shared, at least in literature, by quadroon and Indian heroines, who were similarly admired.

Buntline's Magdalena is described as an ideal model of womanhood for the very fact that she *does* cross-dress. When her Texas Ranger husband is captured by Mexican troops, she refuses to sit idly by. She forms "a determination, bold as it was sudden," to darken her face like an Indian, don men's clothing, and steal weapons to arm herself for his rescue. Such actions, the author writes, "showed well what a *true* woman's heart is capable of when she loves and her beloved is in danger."[45] Such a statement suggests that the author expected his readers to agree that more faint-hearted women—the swooning, frail, light-skinned type—were actually poor examples of femininity, incapable of loving with true, abiding intensity.

Since they hailed from a society that cloistered women into "domestic spheres," most white, American characters professed surprise when they encountered these Amazonian women with their borrowed breeches and stolen pistols. The author, however, was always quick to soothe both his characters and readers' qualms by assuring only the most noble, patriotic, selfless, and even occasionally philanthropic reasons for such behavior. In Buntline's prize-winning dime novel, *The Maid of Monterey*, the astonished American soldier Blakely asks the cross-dressed Mexican officer, Edwina, whether the Mexican army is so desperate that it has resorted to arming women. "It is time they did so, Senor," she answers angrily, "when the *men* prove so cowardly." She haughtily declines his offer of assistance, declaring "I can defend myself. I fear not a man who treads the earth!" Similarly, Isora de la Vega in Averill's *Secret Service Ship* explains that she only became the cross-dressing leader of Mexico's most notorious robber band to gain access to a prison where one of her family members is imprisoned. "[Do not] think me indelicate or unwomanly," she begs her American lover, for she insists that she became "Queen of the Banditti" not only to rescue her kin, but also to reform her bandit comrades. She is "endeavoring, as far as possible," she piously declares "to render their nature and actions more emollient and merciful."[46] It just so happens, of course, that she's also a remarkably talented warrior who proves herself equal to the task of fighting alongside her beloved.

Rather than be repulsed by such a lack of appropriate, feminine meekness, American heroes were invariably fascinated by cross-dressing *señoritas*. "Beautiful as she is brave!" Blakely reverently exclaims as he watches the "noble figure" of Edwina riding away. When the woman later asks Blakely why he takes such an interest in her, he replies "you are brave and beautiful, ay more, you are a patriot, such as my soul loves." Midshipman Rogers is similarly infatuated with Isora's power over her robber band. "It is strange and mysterious," he muses, that "a noble Mexican maiden, of seventeen summers," would "adopt a wild bandit life," but he nonetheless admits a "mingled wonder and admiration of the singular and beautiful being who stood before him." After watching her fight several times—many of which involve his own rescue—Rogers admits to being utterly enamored of Isora. Even her most masculine actions are

[45] Buntline, *Magdalena,* 55.
[46] Buntline, *The Maid of Monterey,* 12, 50; Averill, *The Secret Service Ship,* 45.

described as beautiful and somehow womanly, the motions of an Amazonian queen or a warring Athena. She "spring[s] swift as the winged lightening," "wildly wielding her weapon," and leaps "into the thickest of the fight" like a "little tigress."[47] For Blakely and Rogers, at least, bravery, athleticism, nationalism, and an aggressive, energetic spirit are qualities far more valuable than the so-called "cardinal virtues" of the "cult of true womanhood."

Despite a *señorita's* fearlessness, it was always necessary that the American hero prove his own masculinity by rescuing her a number of times, and by convincing her to marry him. Their love, furthermore, was intended to allow the *señoritas* to display their feminine sides, proving themselves loyal, adoring, and just docile enough to be considered paragons of female virtue. Like idealized quadroon and Indian characters, *señoritas* were presented as jewels with multiple, scintillating facets. They could be sexual and passionate but loyal and submissive, fierce and courageous against enemies but doting and dependent on their lovers, and as masculine or feminine as a situation required. Despite the numbers of times Isora saves Midshipman Rogers in *The Secret Service Ship*, for example, she still refers to him as her "guardian angel," and he gallantly requests "the right to be a protector unto you." Though *she* is the one to save *him* in a particularly daring rescue in the Mexican capital, Midshipman Rogers holds Isora close and kisses a brow that was "now as soft and yielding and womanlike in love, as she was brave and wild and fearless in her periods of passion." The author attributes such a fascinating combination of character traits to "the mingled nature of the pure maiden of Mexico," and implies that it is the very reason for his American character's immediate and intense infatuation.[48]

Although authors made their cross-dressing *señoritas* give up their masculine trappings once they conceded to marry their American lovers and enter American society, they also suggested that the women's courageous, passionate spirits remained unquenched. When sailing back to the United States to live with Blakely's family, for example, Edwina refuses to retreat below-decks during a storm. "The brave girl would not shrink from this danger," the author explains, "for she knew that she had passed even greater perils than this before—and she would not shrink" from her husband's side. Similarly, when the Virginian soldier in Lippard's *Legends of Mexico* asks his wife Inez if she will accompany him "through the roar of battle" then raging between the Americans and Mexicans in the capital, she answers "with the warm blood glowing in her cheek, . . . 'I will!'"[49] Such a woman, authors seemed to imply, would be more than a match for any trial an individual, society, or nation could throw in her path. More specifically, she would be a particularly fit companion for a young, aggressive American nation moving toward an imperial, industrial future.

Such endings therefore suggested that Spanish American women would be more suitable partners than white women for America's destiny—or, at least, for the types of men who took charge of it in the borderlands. While this interpretation is certainly extreme, it nonetheless fits into the pattern echoed in southern and frontier literature. As in the other genres, the lighter-skinned characters were very obviously presented as weaker, more fearful, and reserved than their darker counterparts. While never evil and rarely the darker woman's rival, as sometimes occurred in the other two genres, the white (or otherwise markedly light-skinned) women of southwestern fiction were almost always secondary characters. Generally, they were either sweet

[47] Buntline, *The Maid of Monterey*, 15, 49; Averill, *The Secret Service Ship*, 20, 32, 36.
[48] Averill, *The Secret Service Ship*, 66-68.
[49] Buntline, *The Maid of Monterey*, 12, 50, 15, 49, 94; Lippard, *Legends of Mexico*, 32.

but uninteresting, and therefore relatively ignored by the author; pretty and likeable but vapid and inept; or feeble and helpless until inspired and assisted by a strong, dark female character.

Azelia, the daughter of a Spanish nobleman and a Saxon mother in Buntline's *Bellamira,* is so virtuous, virginal, and ascetic that she's almost obnoxious. Her father, a hedonistic aristocrat addicted to the vices offered by the Peruvian city of Callao, laments that his daughter inherited only the cold, phlegmatic spirit of her deceased German mother. She is, he complains, "opposed to all that makes life pleasant." Azelia responds that all her father "extols as *pleasure* would be to my soul torment," as she hates the "gay dances and licentious revels" and needs only her books, "pencil, needle, and music" for her own pleasure. "Beasts alone," she declares, "regard things entirely sensual." Indeed, she finds herself so surrounded by detestable gaiety that she begs to "early die and go to heaven" rather than remain in a vice-ridden world. Even her notion of love is entirely devoid of any sexual feeling; it is instead compared to childlike devotion. "Love," she states, "is a pure, holy, soul enwrapping feeling, . . . sweet as the dreams of sleeping infancy."[50]

Though Azelia's story ends happily, with her betrothal to a virtuous nobleman and the destruction of depraved Callao by an earthquake, there are no satisfying scenes of amorous passion or marriage. Buntline ends his story by piously stating his intention of presenting "the striking contrast between *virtue* and *vice*," and proving "that virtue and innocence always is rewarded by a just and perfect Providence." Yet the so-called "moral" seems tongue-in-cheek. After all, Buntline makes his female protagonist almost painfully virtuous, and kills off the Countess of Santa Clara, his fascinating, beautiful, dark antagonist. One suspects, therefore, that Buntline's righteous "moral" is meant to toy with his readers' preference for the Countess, a "queen of the earth" who is "voluptuously beautiful," with a bosom described as a "heaving pocket of love."[51] Presented with a so-called "happy" ending of the triumph of virtue, Buntline orchestrates his characters and plot in such a way that the reader somehow feels bereft.

Many light-skinned women were presented as too pure and holy for the hardships of the world, unable to battle them with the courageous spirits of their dark-skinned counterparts. Ximena, the light-skinned, "delicate, fragile flower" of Buntline's *Magdalena,* stays at home while her dark-skinned sister, the story's title character, falls in love with an American soldier and arms herself to defend him. "La Pensarosa," as Ximena is called, spends her time gently warning Magdalena against rash actions and lamenting the trials and grief of the war. From the first few pages of her introduction, Buntline seems inclined to kill her off later in the plot, emphasizing her otherworldly spirit. She is presented with a rosary clasped to her bosom, her eyes gazing at heaven "as if, already, she saw that there was a place of rest prepared for her; and her pure young lips were silently moving, as if she communed with unseen spirits."[52] Indeed, Ximena seems more in touch with the spirit than the human world, since she never forms any attachments to anyone besides her family members. While Magdalena's story comes to a tragic end when, upon finding her American lover dead on the battlefield, she commits suicide, Buntline seems uninterested—or perhaps assumes the reader's disinterest—in Ximena's fate. She is last sighted on the deserted battlefield with her father, searching for her family members among the corpses.

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[50] Buntline, *Bellamira,* 27—28.
[51] Ibid., 50, 27, 29.
[52] Buntline, *Magdalena,* 12-13, 32.

Some light-skinned characters, lacking either a forceful spirit or a devoted American lover to defend them, became tragic casualties of the plot. Teresa, she of the "fair cheek" and "snowy breast" in Lippard's *Legends of Mexico,* falls victim to the stray bullet that pierces both her and her brother's skulls. She is buried with the rest of her family, while her darker sister Ximena sails to the United States with her new, American husband. Two of the pale, blond Dutch sisters in *Francis Berrian* also prove too weak for the hardships of the borderlands. Exiled to the Mexican mountains during the revolution, they waste away and die—though the reader is never entirely sure what kills them. While the author describes both the father and his daughters as growing ever more feeble, faint, and languid, he emphasizes the gradual *whitening* of the daughters. One dies while dressed "in a white muslin mantle," her face "blanched to the whiteness of her robe." The other becomes a "pale shadow," a flower on whom "the bloom was gone," leaving only the "whiteness of alabaster in her cheek." Like Buntline's Azelia and Lippard's Xelima, they yearn for death, rhapsodizing about the "mild blue firmament" where "God the Redeemer" awaits them, and sighing that "this weary existence clung to [them] against [their] will."[53]

As for the one surviving sister, Wilhelmine, Berrian explains that her nature is too tranquil, and her love too sisterly, to ever make her a suitable partner. He feels for her "only the interest and the attachment of a brother," and "none of the feverish and tumultuous sensations" with which he recalls Martha, his beautiful Mexican lover. He describes his feelings for the Dutch girl as "tranquil" and "bland as the mountain breeze." Even the revelation of her own love for him cannot sway Berrian. After all, even her love is described as somewhat bland, sisterly, and asexual. It is described not as "the romantic fondness of the beautiful Martha," but "something tenderer, . . . pure as [the feeling] of a sister" that lacked "ardor" because of her "self control." Berrian is urged to marry Wilhelmine so as to be "her father, and brother, and sister," after she loses her entire family.[54] It is clear that Berrian, however, seeks an amorous, sexual partner, not simply an affectionate new family member. Thus the "romantic" Martha, who awakens such "feverish" emotions, is acknowledged to be his true love .

That, unfortunately, was always the final problem with almost all light-skinned female characters in southwestern literature: if they did fall in love, they were incapable of feeling true passion. Thus Azelia sees love only as a "pure, holy" feeling, "sweet as the dreams of sleeping infancy," and Wilhelmine as a "tender," "pure," sisterly affection. As for Luz, the blond-haired, blue-eyed sister of the dark, mustachioed Guadalupe in Reid's *Rifle Rangers,* her affections are as light and vapid as the breeze. While her sister is a "heroine of extremes" who feels the "desperate intensity of one passion," Luz is "light-hearted" and shallow. Her "tender heart" passes through "ever-changing emotions" like "shadows thrown by straggling clouds upon the sun-lit stream." She and the American who eventually falls in love with her—a soldier who is, interestingly, an inferior officer to dark Guadalupe's lover—are described as "beings who could laugh, dance, and sing together, romp for months, and then get married, as a thing of course." They were not, however, people who could form any real attachments, since the narrator insists that "any accident" that might prevent such a "happy consummation" wouldn't leave "a broken heart on either side." As for the love between himself and Guadalupe, the narrator insists that was far "more serious." It was a love so absolute that it seemed "a holy sentiment," so profound

[53] Lippard, *Legends of Mexico*, 117—121; Flint, *Francis Berrian,* 2: 107, 114, 116, 118, 120.
[54] Ibid., 2: 85, 121.

that it held "no mirth."[55] In other words, according to Reid, the love of the darker lady was simply more real, enduring, and romantic than that of her lighter sister.

In fact, the passions and heroism of dark female characters were often portrayed as inspirations to their fairer, more feeble counterparts. In a surprising number of stories where the whiter woman actually did win a man's love, a dark-skinned friend inspired her to such reckless behavior as cross-dressing and gun-fighting. They were, of course, always emphasized as being much more uncomfortable in the role than their dark accomplices. Nonetheless, such daring adventures were almost always successful, ending in an escape from whatever prison a father, priest, or would-be-husband had confined them to, a daring rescue of their lovers, and an eventual marriage. Such plots therefore implicitly suggested that dark blood—either directly or indirectly—was necessary for women to brave true adventures and realize true love.

In *The Secret Service Ship*, the fair, frail stock character is Inez Ildefonso, daughter of the ex-president General Iturbide. Her beauty is described as "ethereal, sweet, and gentle," with a "slight and symmetrical, and very delicate" frame, "silken," "glossy" curls, "soft" blue eyes, and "fair, white" skin. Forced by her father into an engagement she does not want (for she is in love with a man called Don Bernardo, who has been missing for five years), Inez is described as a frail, swooning, weeping "lamb going to the sacrifice."[56]

Ten pages later, however, Inez learns of the adventures of the "Queen of the Banditti"—the indomitable Isora beloved by Midshipman Rogers. Inspired by Isora's fearless, noble spirit, Inez announces her intention to cross-dress, join the robber band, and thus gain access to the dangerous places where her lover may be imprisoned. Her father is so utterly shocked by this resolve that he asks whether she's gone mad. "Your sweet and gentle nature is probably far contrasted with the fearless and bold character of this Queen of the Banditti," he argues. Inez acknowledges that she does indeed have "more of the gazelle than the lioness," and "more of the mild Venus than the wild Amazon" in her nature. Nonetheless, she insists that the "masculine prowess" and "heroism" of the Queen of the Banditti can assist her in finding her true love. Even the subject itself inflames her, igniting the sort of passions generally only described in dark female characters. Her "soft blue eyes flas[h] with a life and fire such as in moments of passion renders the azure orb as lustrous and brilliant as the night-hued eye."[57] Inspired by Isora, Inez does indeed cross-dress and join the robbers—though enemies capture her almost immediately, and Midshipman Rogers and Isora must rescue her.

Other dark female characters sometimes assisted their lighter friends even more directly, saving their lives as well as those of the American heroes, and getting rewarded with a mixed-race marriage. In Harry Halyard's *The Warrior Queen,* two white, American sisters are kidnapped during the Mexican-American War. Golden-haired, blue-eyed, "elegantly proportioned," and with "ruddy hue[s] of health and innocence," they face all adversities by wringing their hands, weeping, or raising their eyes and sighing "Father in Heaven!"[58] Their beautiful, dark-skinned,"brunette" Mexican friend Anzalina saves both women multiple times. With the help of her handy, razor-sharp stiletto, she also rescues and defends the girls' lovers, two American soldiers, on multiple occasions. In fact, her loyalty to the Americans is so

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[55] Reid, *The Rifle Rangers*, 154, 159.
[56] Averill, *The Secret Service Ship*, 22, 36, 70, 25.
[57] Ibid., 35-36
[58] Harry Halyard, *The Warrior Queen; or, The Buccaneer of the Brazos: A Romance of Mexico* **(**Boston : F. Gleason, 1848), 12, 18.

complete, and so careless of her own safety, that her Mexican friends scorn her as a traitor. When even her own, Mexican lover does so, she angrily announces that her love for him has turned to hatred, and abandons him forever. Pocahontas-like, she ends up officially allying with the Americans, and marries one of their number at the end of the story.

The fair, frail American Avaline is the title character of *The Heroine of Tampico*—though the reader soon learns that such a epithet is not really deserved. That prestigious honor truly belongs to the Indian girl Azilca, Avaline's maid, who rescues her white friend on numerous occasions and plans all her boldest escapades. When Avaline is shut up in a convent(a recurring fate for "light" female characters), Azilca brings her men's clothes and a pistol so that she can cross-dress and escape right under the nuns' noses. True to her demure nature, Avaline balks at the idea, but finally decides that "desperation sometimes lends courage to the veriest cowards in the world"[59]

Interestingly, her man's clothing appears to lend Avaline the kind of valor usually only reserved for darker women. When she accidentally enters a battle between American and Mexican troops, she forces the cowardly enemy to retreat just by waving her pistol around. Yet such bravado is not truly in Avaline's nature: as soon as she sees the retreat, Avaline's fierceness dissolves, and she swoons in exhaustion from such excitement—right into Azilca arms. Later, when given the title "The Heroine of Tampico," Avaline is chagrinned. While characters like Isora de la Vega reveled in such titles as "Queen of the Bandits," Avaline insists that she does "not deserve such a proud title," for she "can hardly account" for her "rash manner."[60] It was, the author seems to suggest, simply the effect of the heat of the moment, her masculine attire, and the inspiration of the daring Azilca. After that unexpected moment, Avaline never again cross-dresses or acts boldly. In fact, she is swiftly captured again and confined to the same convent, there to await a second rescue from her lover.

Azilca, on the other hand, is presented as a woman whose courage never falters. Although living in Mexico, she is introduced as the daughter of a Seminole chieftain, and thus fits into a kind of intermediary category between the stock figures of the *señorita* and the Indian princess. Having become very adept at "housewifery and domestic concerns" while serving as Avaline's maid, she has thus shed the trappings of her barbaric roots. In fact, her graceful bearing and noble spirit awe even a family of wealthy New Englanders. A young lieutenant, the brother of Avaline's own lover, falls in love with the Indian girl from the moment he sees her, and marries her without a single reference to her racial background. His New England family treats her "with the same attention which they would have lavished upon their own daughter." Indeed, they profess themselves especially fascinated by her heroic, fearless spirit. Her lover's mother tells Azilca "how wonderful it is, that one so young and fragile as you appear to be, should have passed safely through such exciting and dangerous scenes." The Indian girl replies that this is the result both of her race, which "has been cast in the midst . . . of danger, destruction, and death," and of her gentle upbringing by an adopted white father. It was he, she explains, who taught her "to bear prosperity with moderation, and adversity with calm and patience."[61] Such a conversation establishes Azilca as the ideal kind of mixed-race wife celebrated in various literary genres: she possesses the admirable characteristics of a dark race tempered by the civilized qualities of white America. If the reader were to rank characters based

[59] Halyard, *The Heroine of Tampico,* 49.
[60] Ibid., 49—51.
[61] Ibid., 37—48

on the attention the author and other characters lavish on their praises, he or she would certainly consider Azilca the *real* "Heroine of Tampico."

Besides the few characters mentioned, the majority of southwestern fiction actually contained very few "pure"—meaning Anglo—white women. Some stories featured women who *appeared* white, but were nonetheless Spanish American. And, whether truly white or not, these women were almost invariably secondary characters, far less captivating than their darker friends. Most importantly of all, their stories did not contain the kind of all-consuming, sacrificial, eternal love portrayed between dark *señoritas* and white men. It was this kind of love that became the story's fulcrum, and that almost always ensured reciprocation from the primary white hero. Furthermore, southwestern fiction almost always allowed a happy ending for the interracial romance. Often, stories blatantly referenced the ameliorative effects of miscegenation and the ease by which the two races, nations, and societies welcomed each other and blended together. Such endings certainly smack of imperialist themes, but they also suggest the prevalence of certain racial fantasies.

The so-called "threat" to white women was located in two, very obvious patterns in southwestern literature. Firstly, the prevalence of happy, wildly romantic marriages between white men and Spanish American women that were apparently the joy and envy of a warmly welcoming American society. Secondly, the ubiquity of descriptions comparing Spanish American lands to tropical paradises in desperate need of white, American hands to cultivate both their unkempt but rich fields and their beautiful, oppressed women. In this way, Spanish America itself became a character in southwestern fiction— one that, like its women, posed a threat to white, American females. Both the region and its lovely sirens lured American men away from their women, homes, and livelihoods into new worlds so captivating they would never wish to return to the United States.

"And so, dear reader, please do consider our hero and heroine happily wedded. . . .[This] is the history of almost every American heart which has lost itself among the charms of the bright blooming maidens of sunny Mexico."[62]

The Love of White Men and the Threat to White Women

The love *señoritas* were supposed to bear for their white lovers in southwestern fiction almost exactly resembled that born by quadroon and Indian characters in other literary genres. All three always fell instantly and ardently in love with white men, vowed that their hearts would never be given to another, were willing to sacrifice themselves for their lovers' lives, and often committed suicide rather than suffer life without love. The key difference, however, was that *señoritas* very rarely suffered unrequited love; more importantly, they never consented to any other relationship besides marriage. While quadroon and Indian characters appeared well aware of the obstacles American law and society placed before legitimate interracial marriage, *señoritas* never expected anything less than official, holy matrimony. Their white lovers, moreover, always seemed determined from the outset to make their *señoritas* wives rather than mistresses, and often proposed quite rashly. In southwestern fiction, the possibility of concubinage, polygyny, or any other type of unofficial marriage was never even mentioned.

[62] Averill, *The Secret Service Ship*, 63, 64, 100.

To a modern reader, the reasons for such determination seem obvious: the ladies were always portrayed as so beautiful, noble, brave and lovesick that the white men could not help but fall instantly head-over-heels for them. Marriage seems to have occurred because the white heroes were totally confident that the *señoritas* were among the world's most superior women. Yet such a reason does not hold weight when considered in the context of other antebellum literary genres, specifically the romances involving quadroons and Indians. Then, too, the women were presented as some of the most spectacular of the female sex, despite their race, and yet happy endings, interracial marriage, and miscegenation were far rarer themes. Perhaps, then, the reason is more likely to be found in the antebellum American mindset. If, as has been shown in previous chapters, travelogues strongly influenced fiction, it is reasonable to suppose that the plethora of travel literature encouraging and applauding interracial marriages with Spanish American women contributed to the ensuing literary theme. Of course, the travel literature often advertised the ease with which a man could contract unofficial unions with open-hearted, open-armed Spanish American women. Nonetheless, it was also quite blatant about the advantages a man could enjoy were he to contract a legitimate marriage with an elite, "Spanish," land-rich *señorita*. The majority of travel literature describing quadroons and Indian women, on the other hand, specifically focused on the myriad reasons concubinage was preferable to legitimate marriage. It appears, then, that southwestern literature simply spun the highest claims of travel literature into fantasy. In fiction, the majority of *señoritas* were beautiful, aristocratic, wealthy, and, despite their passionate natures, virtuous enough to be virgins on their wedding day. They therefore deserved the same, vaunted treatment as beloved, respectable white women.

Yet the problem—almost certainly unintentional, if not totally unconscious—that this plotline presented was the most direct threat to white marriage of any literary genre. While other, non-white characters may have been presented as superior to the white female prototype, their threat to white women was curbed by the obstacles America's society and legal system placed before the possibility of legitimate marriage. They could, therefore, be identified as superior lovers but not necessarily ideal wives, and thus were the perfect literary concubines. If a happy, successful marriage did occur, it usually had to be set in a distant country or era. The *señorita* character, however, was quite blatantly presented as a superior lover *and* wife—both in the ancient era of the Aztecs and in the contemporary period. She was the white hero's equal in terms of bravery, fighting ability, virility and passion, and a desirable bride because of her virtue, wealth, and noble family. For these reasons, she could bridge the sexual divide between white men and women by replacing the latter entirely.

Guadalupe, in Reid's *Rifle Rangers,* falls in love with an American soldier after meeting him only once. That single encounter, however, suffices for this so-called "heroine of extremes" to pledge her undying devotion to a stranger. "Say again you will never cease to love me," the American begs, and Guadalupe happily replies "Yours—yours—till death!" The title character of Buntline's *Magdalena, The Beautiful Mexican Maid* is similarly struck with undying love from the moment she glimpses the Texas Ranger Charles Brackett from her window—even though he is at that moment a prisoner of the Mexican forces. Even American prisoners, it seems, were so obviously superior to their Spanish American captors that they stole the hearts of the local women as easily as though they were conquering heroes. Such a plotline directly echoes Kendall's famous travelogue of his capture on the Santa Fe Trail. Published two years before Buntline's tale to great popular acclaim, it is certainly possible that Kendall's stories of the doting kindness of Mexican women inspired the fictional romance. Magdalena spends so long

dreamily reminiscing about her glimpse of the handsome, noble American prisoner that her sister finally says in surprise "I think you must have given your heart to that unknown stranger." Indeed, Magdalena's passion is so intense that she beguiles the Mexican guards into letting her visit the American in his prison, where "long and ardently she gazed down into his manly face."[63]

Even when they did not possess Indian blood, s*eñoritas* were often presented as "Pocahontas figures," willing to forgo their national and racial loyalties to pledge themselves completely to their white lovers. Magdalena resolves immediately to rescue Charles Brackett from his prison despite the fact that he is her country's sworn enemy. Though war rages between their two countries, Magdalena promises Brackett after only their second meeting that she "will never yield heart not hand to another!" She marries him immediately after he rescues her in a daring *rapto* from a forced marriage to an evil Mexican. Later, when unflinchingly watching a fierce battle through a spyglass, her father exclaims in angry surprise that she is rooting for the Americans. "When I wedded him, I became an American," she declares, proving just how tenuous *señoritas'* ties are to their own nation, and how prepared they are to be subsumed—literally and metaphorically—by America. Even Isora, the Bandit Queen and fierce Mexican soldier of Averill's *Secret Service Ship,* vows to be Midshipman Rogers' bride as soon as her country is at peace, though she well knows that this will only happen when his people have conquered her own. "I will either be your bride, or never call living man by a husband's tender name," Isora swears, implying either eternal spinsterhood or suicide. "Isora la Vega loves you better than her own life."[64]

Whether or not their death-threats were due to the reality of an on-going war or simply to their ardent natures, Spanish American women seemed unable to bear the notion of life without love. Martha, in Flint's *Francis Berrian,* is similarly willing to seek death should her American lover ever leave her. When he must flee to the mountains to escape the royalists, she mourns that she may never see him again. If that should be true, she swears, "it is death only, that brings repose." Her future life, she says, "will be consecrated to remembrance. . . . Go; forget me, and be happy. But I can never forget you." As for Buntline's Magdalena, she proves the truth of the Mexican women's morbid pledges. Upon finding her husband Charles Brackett dead upon the battlefield, she immediately kills herself and falls atop him in a final embrace.[65]

Magdalena's death, however, is one of the only tragic endings of a *señorita* in southwestern fiction. Authors seemed far more desirous of presenting happy endings of interracial, international union by wedding the *señorita* to her American hero. In *Legends of Mexico,* Lippard blatantly invites the reader to admire the beauty of the love between two starkly different races, and to eagerly anticipate miscegenation. In a scene where he places Inez, his beautiful Mexican woman, kneeling beside her American soldier, he urges the reader to admire the "impressive types of widely contrasted races." The man, " born of the land of Washington, a wanderer from the hills of Virginia" kneels in amorous reverence beside the "voluptuous daughter of the land of the Aztec, with the old Castilian blood, mingling in her veins with the blood of Montezuma." It is very likely that Prescott's *History of Mexico* and the popular fiction surrounding the Aztec people profoundly influenced Lippard, for he lavishes praises on "the blood of the Montezumas." "Did you ever read of Montezuma?" he asks the reader directly,

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[63] Reid, *The Rifle Rangers,* 163; Buntline, *Magdalena*, 14, 20.
[64] Ibid., 35, 76; Averill, *The Secret Service Ship,* 67.
[65] Flint, *Franis Berrian,* 1: 228; Buntline, *Magdalena,* 88.

describing an imaginary scene of the emperor that has clearly been perpetuated by the fantasies of travel and fictional literature. He urges the reader to imagine Montzuma as "the last of a long line of kings, surrounded by kneeling nobles, and served at the festival table, by groups of beautiful women, dark-eyed and passionate daughters of the south." Though conquered "by Fate, not by Man," in Lippard's exalted telling Montezuma's "blood still beat in the veins of his daughters, who were joined in marriage with the proudest of the Castilian nobility." Indeed, Lippard celebrates the notion that the end of the Mexican-American War will bring about similar "proud" miscegenation between Anglo Saxon, American men and the mixed-race daughters of Montezuma. "As the Aztec people crumbled before the Spaniard," he writes victoriously, "so will the mongrel race, moulded of Indian and Spanish blood, melt into, and be ruled by, the Iron Race of the North."[66] To Lippard, such miscegenation was admirable, beautiful, and necessary.

In *The Secret Service Ship,* miscegenation is presented as national union, and interracial marriage as an ideal kind of peace treaty. According to this plotline, the Mexican-American War appears to have simply been a conflict between two types of men. The brave, honorable Americans needed to conquer the arrogant yet cowardly Mexican men in order to secure their superior claim to Mexican lands and women. "You have carried [my heart] by storm!" Midshipman Rogers enthuses to the Bandit Queen Isora, "You have made a breach in the walls, . . . you have made a full conquest of my heart." Such a statement implies that the conquest was mutual: while American men captured Mexican lands, Mexican women captured American hearts. The victory, then, was not a victorious subjugation of inferior women, but the happy alliance of two perfectly suited partners. "By *nationality* we are enemies," Rogers laments, but "say not that in *feeling* and in *love* we are foes! . . . Mexico's maidens are the noblest gem and most beauteous flower of her fair land." As the two pledge their undying love, the author breaks in to request that "the reader join in the lovers' prayer for the speedy termination of this unfortunate war, and the restoration of sweet, mild peace between us and that fair land, whose beauteous daughters have won so many noble American hearts." Apparently expecting his audience to enthusiastically applaud such an interracial, international union, the author fondly tells his "dear reader" to "consider our hero and heroine happily wedded at the end of the war." He then demands that the reader "join with us in wishing a speedy conclusion to a campaign whose close is to be so happily crowned with love's blushing flowers." After all, he celebrates, such happing endings are "the history of almost every American heart which has lost itself among the charms of the bright blooming maidens of sunny Mexico."[67] Such a generalizing statement, encompassing all Mexican women without reference to their racial composition, and "almost every" American heart, offers on the one hand a possibility of peaceful alliance between two nations. On the other, however, it seems to present an implicit threat to white, American marriages. An American heart "lost" among the charms of Mexican women was also lost to those white women left far behind in the States.

While most stories ended with a marriage and only hinted at the future of miscegenation, some blatantly applauded the production of truly exceptional mixed-race children. The earliest southwestern story, *Francis Berrian,* ends with Berrian's proud mention of his and Martha's "fine boy," who is "a happy union of Spanish and Yankee." The son is a lovely combination of the most striking traits of both his parents' races, with "a very fair complexion, and eyes and hair as black as sloe." Furthermore, because of his international roots, at only two years old "he can

[66] Lippard, *Legends of Mexico,* 29, 31, 33, 15.
[67] Averill, *The Secret Service Ship,* 63, 64, 100.

already scold papa and mama in two languages, call himself '*bon garcon*' in French, and knock over the plates and cups, like a young lord." When he grows to adulthood, Berrian declares, he "will make an uncommon man." In other words, the author seems to suggest, an American man's union with a superior *señorita* will create children who combine the most beautiful traits of both, possess international talents, and bear themselves like the aristocrats their Mexican bloodlines establish them to be. Such an "uncommon" child would certainly appear superior in many ways to that of a monolingual, middle-class, white American youth. Indeed, the author himself, through the voice of his narrator, claims that miscegenation—or what is "technically" called "crossing the breed"—is "considered a great improvement," since "the children unite the desirable points of character in both races."[68]

According to the literature, then, marriage and miscegenation with Spanish American women was desirable and advantageous to all. Furthermore, unlike quadroon concubines kept safely hidden in "Little Houses" or New Orleans apartments, or Indian "wives" cloistered in western forts or left with their tribes, Spanish American *señoritas* were very often brought back to America. There, authors universally agreed, they enjoyed the approbation of American society.

Francis Berrian, for example, explains that the trifling obstacles to his happy union with Martha were easily surmounted: he simply tolerated her Catholicism, and she became an American patriot. Their family spends half its time in New England with his people, and the other half at the gorgeous Mexican estate a grateful Mexican government awarded Berrian for his services. Ximena in Lippard's *Legends of Mexico* is welcomed by her American soldier's Virginia family "as though she had been a gift, sent to them from Paradise."[69] Almost all of the "dark" heroines in the literature here mentioned—Guadalupe in Reid's *Rifle Rangers,* Xelima in Newton Curtis's *Vidette*, Edwina in Buntline's *Maid of Monterey,* Anzalina in Halyard's *Warrior Queen,* and Azilca in Halyard's *Heroine of Tampico*—are also brought back to America as the trophies of their proud American husbands.

In *The Volunteer: or, the Maid of Monterey,* Buntline portrays an American family's reaction to their son's letter that he is bringing home a Mexican wife. The letter describes her as a woman with "eyes and hair as black as a thundercloud, teeth like pearls, [and] a form like a picture," who can also "fight like a tiger." Rather than make any excuses about her dark race or masculine traits, Blakely proudly asks his parents "Now isn't that a wife worth having?" Interestingly, Buntline points out a significant, gendered difference in the family's reaction. "I can't see why he couldn't have got a wife good enough for him amongst the girls of our own neighborhood," Blakely's mother frets. "As to the fighting—why if that's true, he's a fool to have her and I'm sure blue eyes are prettier than black ones any day!" Such a defensive statement seems to imply that Blakely's mother feels somewhat threatened by her son's choice. She cannot understand why the meek, blue-eyed, white women of his Kentucky home fail to capture her son's heart. Blakely's father, on the other hand, seems to share somewhat in his son's disillusionment with American women, or at least to appreciate his preference for an exotic trophy. "The boy wants to bring home some curiosity of the country, I suppose!" the father tells his wife merrily. "She'll create an excitement here, won't she, with her black eyes and dark skin." Instead of sounding concerned or angry, the father is described as having "a spark of pride

[68] Flint, *Francis Berrian,* 2: 264, 266.
[69] Ibid, 2: 264, 265; Lippard, *Legends of Mexico,* 121.

in his eye, as his imagination painted the beautiful girl to his mind."[70] Although unacknowledged by the characters or the author, such an obvious disconnect between the two reactions points to the reality—at least in this particular story— of a "crisis of femininity." As both parents notice, some kind of disillusionment with America and a restless desire for excitement, ardor, and the "curiosities" of other countries seemed to be pushing young American men out from the demure arms of white women and into the passionate embraces of their non-white rivals.

The vast majority of southwestern fiction ended with the Spanish American woman's successful integration into North American society. Yet a striking number of stories chose to elaborate on travel literature's focus on Spanish America itself, depicting it as a paradisiacal land even more desirable than the United States. Spanish American lands were described as incredibly lush, fertile tropical paradises dotted with the kinds of marble-pillared palaces and jeweled fountains that graced tales of classical empires. The rich soil was a riot of flowery splendor begging for skilled cultivation; the animals were as gentle and trusting as those of Eden itself; the temperature was always luxuriously warm with gentle, balmy breezes; and Spanish American women graced the landscape like elegant nymphs frolicking in a garden. In *The Infidel,* Robert Montgomery Bird describes the gardens of the Aztec palace as having "a strange and barbaric magnificence," possessing "all the splendor of the vegetable world" and "a Zoological Garden." Painting a scene reminiscent of Botticelli's *Primavera,* Bird describes five Indian maidens "danc[ing] under the trees on the smooth grass, to the sound of a pipe or lute," surrounded "by banks of the richest flowers." "The dancers," Bird writes, "might indeed have been esteemed nymphs of the wood." In *Montezuma, The Last of the Aztecs,* Maturin similarly describes the valley where the magnificent city of Tenochtitlàn rested as being a "paradise-retreat," a "floating garden" that was Nature's "chosen Eden."[71]

Stories set some three hundred years after the conquest agreed that the Mexican lands retained this fantastical splendor. In fact, in the first few pages of *Legends of Mexico,* Lippard explains that the very reason "the children of Revolutionary veterans took the rifle of '76 from its resting place" when they heard of the outbreak of war with Mexico was because of the marvelous stories they'd heard of that fabled land. "The stories of that far-off land, with its luxuriant fruits, its plains of flowers, its magnificent mountains overshadowing calm lakes and golden cities," Lippard rapturously describes, "rung [the cry] from ten thousand throats—Mexico!" Once there, authors insisted, American men found their own "nymphs" breezing through the marbled halls of palaces or splashing in the fountains of magnificent estates. Lippard describes his Mexican heroine's room as "a luxurious chamber, paved with mosaic slabs of marble, with a cool fountain" and "steps of cool marble, into garden all shade and bloom, fountains and flowers." Similarly, Henry Haller, the narrator of *The Rifle Rangers,* gets his first glimpse of Guadalupe when she is playing in the delicate, marble fountains of the richly flowering gardens in her own, stunning palace. In almost painstaking detail, Haller describes the "tropical paradise" of her home: the exceptional majesty of her house, the luxurious profusion of flowers, and the brilliantly colored song-birds that flit through the trees. "What must be the Eve of a paradise like this," Reid's narrator wonders.[72] Such a question had quite an obvious answer, if a reader recognized the patterned link between *señoritas* and their settings in southwestern literature. In almost every tale set in a Spanish American country, the *señorita's* lands explicitly

[70] Buntline, *The Volunteer,* 84—85.
[71] Bird, *The Infidel,* 2: 38—46; Maturin, *Montezuma, the Last of the Aztecs,* 1: 7—9.
[72] Lippard, *Legends of Mexico,* 12; Reid, *The Rifle Rangers,* 82-83.

reflected herself. Both were rich, fertile, colorful, and so exceptional that they were described in royal, classical, or divine terms. Furthermore, in most stories, the happy ending of a marriage placed both under the ownership of a lucky American man.

While there was threat enough in the introduction of Spanish American wives into American society (as evidenced by Blakeley's mother, who thinks "he's a fool to have her"), there was an even greater danger that Spanish America would drain America of its eligible bachelors. A striking number of stories echoed the numerous travelogues that mentioned significant examples of American men who remained blissfully happily in Spanish America, married to *señoritas* and perfectly integrated into the highest echelons of society. Captain St. James, the hero of Newton Curtis's *Vidette,* is described as being so bewitched by the olive-skinned, dark-eyed, buxom Xelima that he feels ready to lose himself entirely in obsessive love. "He felt at once," the author writes, "that he could abandon all hopes of fame, all the pleasures of his native land, all the affections of his kindred, and find in the girl before him, an ample compensation for his loss."[73] Such a confession certainly sounds like that of the "Lotus-Eaters" mentioned in travelogues. Like the mythological men who forgot everything about themselves after tasting an island's lilies, St. James is ready to forsake his past life after his first glimpse at one of the "flowers" of Mexico.[74]

Although St. James does bring Xelima back to New England, the author presents some clues of an imminent return to Mexico. Although his New England family is wealthy and respectable, St. James is, after all, possessed of a "rash and impetuous daring," and the "fires" of an "excitable nature" that "had never been disciplined, cramped, or restrained." Such traits seem far more suited to the thrilling, uncertain world of the borderlands than the staid environment of respectable New England society. Furthermore, the author hints at a possible return by mentioning, at the end of the story, that the extensive estate of Xelima's aristocratic family (originally confiscated by a corrupt government) had been returned in all its grandeur. The reader is left wondering whether St. James, now entitled to a place among Spanish nobility, might find Mexico a more alluring home. The same uncertainty colors the end of Francis Berrian, when the title character explains that his family spends half its time in New England and half at his majestic Mexican estate. Considering the fact that Berrian initially left New England to escape his parents' desire that he become a minister, one wonders why he does not spend *all* of his time in the land he once called an "Eden."[75]

Reid, in *The Rifle Rangers,* takes this ending one step further. His narrator, Henry Haller, writes that he and his wife, Guadalupe, had returned to America but recently received a letter from Clayley, the American officer who married Guadalupe's sister. "You were a fool for leaving Mexico," the letter declares, "and you'll never be half as happy anywhere else as I am here." It continues to detail all the ways Clayley has perfected the neglected ranch for cultivation. "I believe I can raise as good cotton here as in Louisiana," he boasts. "I'm the happiest man in creation!" At the letter's close, Clayley begs Haller and Guadalupe to return, and the narrator muses "Reader, do *you* want me to come back?" An asterisk placed at the end of that query provides a cheery footnote that reads "I am happy to say the reader has long since kindly

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[73] Buntline, *The Volunteer,* 84—85; Curtis, 79.
[74] "Flowers" refers to the aforementioned quote in *The Secret Service Ship* in which Midshipman Rogers says "Mexico's maidens are the noblest gem and most beauteous flower of her fair land." Averill, *The Secret Service Ship,* 64.
[75] Curtis, *The Vidette,*12, 13, 79; Flint, *Francis Berrian,*1: 53, 54.

answered this question in the affirmative—Author."[76] Such an ending not only suggests that the narrator himself forsook America to settle in Mexico, but that the reader, captivated by the tale of that fabulous land, urged him to do so. The actual reader's feelings and hypothetical answer to the question, therefore, are inconsequential. Reid answers for *all* his readers, imposing upon them a kind of preference for Mexico over the United States.

The implication of this kind of ending—both in the character's actual expatriation and the readers' real or forced approval of it—presented a unique threat among all the literary genres featuring interracial fantasies. It suggested that Mexican lands and ladies had more to offer American men than those of their own nation, and therefore that American men should willingly become ex-patriots. More importantly, it made the reader complicit with the author and other characters in the promotion of this fantasy. It implied that, were the reader a man presented with a similar choice, he too would choose to abandon his homeland for the lures of Mexico.

Most men, of course, were simply not presented with this possibility. The majority of American men never dreamed of venturing to Mexico to chase after saber-wielding *señoritas* and win themselves grand estates. For that matter, most never intended to explore North American Indian lands in search of Pocahontases, or New Orleans balls and slave markets in search of lovely quadroons. The main point, however, is that such interracial fantasies *did* exist, and that the literary market hastened to cater to it in a variety of fictional and non-fictional genres. Such a demand points to a disillusionment with the gender and sexual dynamics between white American men and women. The final comments of *Francis Berrian's* narrator indicate the primary way such works influenced their audiences. When Berrian finishes his story—which the narrator professes to have heard and transcribed on a steam-boat ride—his listener wants to muse over it. "There is generally, so much grumbling among married people," he earnestly tells Berrian, referencing the kind of American disillusionment with marriage that de Tocqueville himself noticed. "Your case," he continues almost reverently, "seems to be that of a black swan." He admits that he is "very well satisfied with my good old 'lang syne' at home, but I am absolutely in love with your wife."[77]

This, then, was the potential problem such literature posed for white, American women. It was obvious that a number of men from both the North and South possessed black mistresses. It was known that a good many men who conducted western business kept secret—or not-so-secret—Indian wives. And it was clear that significant numbers of men whose travels, military experience, or business brought them through Spanish America found it advantageous to ally themselves with the local families by marrying their daughters. These cases nonetheless remained only minor, isolated threats as long as obstacles such as slavery, geographical distance, racial laws, and a culture of racism remained in place. The danger, however, began to grow when the actions of certain populations of men, small but nonetheless representative of a variety of regions and social classes, were glorified by an ever-growing, ever-diversifying literary public. When readers were willing to acknowledge the lure of Indian or Spanish American lands, and especially when they easily accepted superior black, Indian, or Spanish American heroines and love interests, the cultural obstacle began to crumble. The growing population of mixed-race peoples, furthermore, allowed certain racial excuses to be made. "Ameliorative miscegenation" became a concept that could appear in American public discourse.

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[76] Reid, *The Rifle Rangers*, 332.
[77] Flint, *Francis Berrian*, 2: 266.

The 1860s brought the "crisis of femininity" to a head by removing almost all the obstacles to open, publicly approved, legal miscegenation. The Civil War brought the collapse of slavery which, in some cases, temporarily removed legal barriers to interracial marriage. The United States' annexation of various Mexican, Indian, and other western territories, and the passage of legislation earnestly promoting western migration, brought more white Americans in contact with non-white populations than ever before. In light of the trends and themes analyzed here, one might expect American society's cultural views on miscegenation and non-white races to have become drastically more approving and integrative. Instead, however, historians agree that the latter half of the nineteenth century brought the rigid crystallization of scientific racism; the word "miscegenation" itself, and the fear and loathing attached to it; the proliferation of Jim Crow and anti-miscegenation laws; and the increasing popularity of the notion of superior "Anglo-Saxonism" and obsession with maintaining the "purity of the race." What happened? What factors led to a resolution—if a flawed one—of the so-called "crisis of femininity?" And was the ideological shift entirely spear-headed by men, the era's primary scientists, intellectuals, heads of media, and policy-makers—or did white, American women themselves find a way to combat a "crisis" they may have sensed without identifying?

~8~

"The Duty of American Women to Their Country"[1]
Postbellum Backlash

One of the most widely recognizable images of nineteenth-century American history, splashed over many a textbook's chapter on "manifest destiny," is John Gast's painting, *American Progress.* Nineteenth-century contemporaries, too, were very familiar with this image, glimpsing its reproduction in guidebooks, textbooks, and a multitude of periodicals. When painted in 1872, it perfectly represented many Americans' most cherished ideals about themselves and their society. Across a vast, flat prairie that extends to the imposing tiers of cloud-kissed mountains in the distance, various markers of American "civilization" speed determinedly westward. From the right-hand side—the East—come the railroads, trailing steam tracks; the stage-coaches bouncing recklessly behind galloping horses; and the covered wagons slowly rolling behind doggedly plodding oxen. In the foreground, the prairie wilderness has been transformed into rich, loamy farmland by sturdy-looking farmers with horses, oxen, and plows, and a log cabin can be glimpsed amidst a small copse of freshly planted trees. Before them, fleeing to the left-hand side of the painting—the far West, or perhaps extinction itself—herds of buffalo and various groups of "wild" Indians race away into the shadows. They flee from the dazzling glow of a beautiful, angelic woman who floats in the air above them, carrying a book and a spool of telegraph wire. This, the painting announces, is "Progress" herself, illuminating the path of American civilization.

[1] This quote is taken from the title of Catharine Beecher's work, *The Duty of American Women to Their Country,* in which she called for young, white, respectable American women to venture West as school-teachers in order to educate and civilize the region. Though published in 1845, it was really only in the postbellum period that significant numbers of women, including school-teachers, ventured West.

Figure 8.1: George A. Crofutt, *American Progress,* 1873, chromolithograph after an 1872 painting of the same title by John Gast, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-737].

Interestingly, she is a woman—hardly the forerunner of frontier travel, and hardly the builder of the telegraph lines she grasps or the railroads that run in the wake of her flowing, white dress. Furthermore, she is nothing like the women who graced America's frontier when the first railroads, wagons, stagecoaches and travelers arrived. Her skin gleams alabaster white, her hair is yellow as corn-silk, and she floats languidly through the sky rather than charging forward on a horse or even looking over her shoulder to rally the migrants onward. This is not Cooper's Cora, confronting wild Indians on the northeastern frontier; this is not Pocahontas or any of her emulators, pointing white men through the thickets of the New World wilderness; this is not Isora, the "Queen of the Banditti," charging her horse through the secret Mexican bandit haunts of the southwestern borderlands. This is, instead, a visual representation of the snowy-skinned, faint-hearted, pure white women whom literature found so unsuited for frontier living. By 1872, then, brave, dark-skinned Cora's death has been mourned and it is the fair Alice who, paradoxically, leads the charge into the "wild" West.

By 1872, as this painting demonstrates, the "crisis of femininity" was fast declining—and white women themselves appeared to be at the forefront of the battle. The classic historiography of the latter half of the nineteenth century has pointed to such developments as the Civil War, the formation of the KKK, the increase in lynching, the "opening" of the West by the passage of such legislation as the Homestead Act, the steady push of the telegraph, railroad, and telephone companies, the Indian Wars, the Dawes Act and reservation policies, the rise of scientific racism, the systematic disenfranchisement of non-whites, the legal and illegal means by which Indian and Mexican-American lands were confiscated, segregation policies, and the passage of anti-miscegenation legislation across America as the major reasons the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were some of the most exclusionary, racist, and segregated decades of the nation's history. Men, specifically, are seen to have been the driving force behind these changes.

The hunger to have all land, economic, and political power in the hands of white men is often cited as the reason "miscegenation" became such a universally loathed and feared term in white American society.

In fact, a kind of historical amnesia was forced upon Americans, and has lasted until today. The *entire* nineteenth century is often portrayed as being unfailingly hostile to miscegenation and mixed-race peoples. The reality, that there was a time when American men of all social classes and regions could and *did* seek out interracial relations with relative social tolerance—and that such relations could even be romanticized in the social imagination—has oddly been obscured.

This major shift in the American understanding only occurred in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Certainly, it was effected by the aforementioned forces of war, migration, and law. And, certainly, as the primary soldiers, legislators, politicians and landowners, white men were partly responsible for the changes. Women, having so little political, military, or economic power, are hard to locate in the official records illustrating the transition from relative tolerance and acceptance of miscegenation to total abhorrence. Yet, as this dissertation has aimed to show, women *did* have immense social and cultural power that enabled them to influence such national changes in a variety of indirect ways. Non-white women managed to influence American culture and society by leaving their marks in church marriage and divorce records, wills, literature, and the skin tones and features of the children they shared with white men. They were, furthermore, able to threaten white women's secure marriages. In their turn, white women were an integral part of the backlash of the nineteenth century: consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, they managed to battle the threat and abate their "crisis." After all, the major reason white contemporaries claimed for the rise of the KKK, lynching, Jim Crow, and miscegenation laws in the South was to "protect" white women. And in the West, the major force involved in "taming" the region's "wilds"—as John Gast portrayed—was announced to be the "civilizing" influence of the ever-increasing numbers of white women.[2]

I have not sought in this project to prove that non-white women ever truly posed a major threat to white women's place in society: American racism was simply too ingrained for a full reversal of the social order to ever occur. Yet, as has been shown, interracial unions and, especially, the mixed-race peoples they produced, posed a variety of threats to American institutions—even that most hallowed of traditions, white marriage. By the middle of the century, a mixed-race population had become so prevalent—both physically, in all American regions, and conceptually, in the American literary imagination—that a major societal change

[2] This chapter will delve deeper into the historiography concerning gender—specifically the cultural, social, and political impact of white women, especially on race relations—in the South and West in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Besides the works analyzed in this dissertation, some of the major literature includes: Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896—1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom : Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and The Meaning of Race in The Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Nell Irvin Painter, *Southern History Across the Color Line* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Jeanne Boydston, Marry Kelley, Anne Margolis, *The Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women's Rights and Woman's Sphere* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Jane Simonsen, *Making Home Work: Domesticity and Native American Assimilation in the American West, 1860—1919* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Virginia Scharff, *Home Lands: How Women Made the West* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010); Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: "Civilizing" the West? 1840—1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998); Elizabeth Jameson and Sheila McManus, eds, *One Step Over the Line: Toward a History of Women in the North American Wests* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008).

was inevitable. American society would either have to find a way to create a legitimate social space for this population and to effect some sort of assimilation strategy, or it would have to promptly and officially deny them both. In sum, it would either become a society that replicated the complex, fluid racial and social hierarchies of Spanish American countries, or it would designate itself a starkly biracial world with rigidly enforced boundaries between "white" and "non-white." Prior to 1865, as this dissertation has shown, the future of America's racial society was actually far more uncertain than historians who focus primarily on the latter decades of the century have claimed.

While the system of slavery, the distance of the western frontier, and various economic and social advantages of interracial unions were still in existence, certain balances of power could still exist. In the West, land, economic skills, and political power in the hands of Indian tribes and Mexican families created a somewhat equal balance with whites who offered financial, economic, and, after the American takeover, political power. Such mutual advantages led whites to seek interracial union, and allowed the growth of a class of mixed-blood people. In the South, a different kind of balance existed: one in which one class, being enslaved, had *no* power and thus rarely posed a threat (despite a number of slave rebellions) to white rule. Both the southern and western power structures were also built upon a gender balance—or, perhaps more aptly, a gender *imbalance*. In the South, relationships between black women and white men were predicated upon the lack of power of the black women themselves, black men, and white women; they were, therefore, carefully constructed upon the South's rigid patriarchy. In the West, interracial unions were similarly built on white women's lack of power—in this case, an almost total lack of their presence. Both regions therefore required an exceptionally precarious social balance that would be completely toppled by the end of the century.

The Civil War in 1865, the subsequent passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments, and the massive waves of migration—including large numbers of white women—that washed over the western frontier in the latter half of the nineteenth century eradicated both these social balances and, in some ways, much of white men's power. Now, white men were held accountable for interracial relations that posed new threats to an American society which, spearheaded by the federal government, seemed dangerously close to promoting racial equality. In order to retain white power, the porous boundaries between the races would have to be immediately and rigidly sealed, and the unfortunate, mixed-race members of intermediate racial categories would be forced to choose their racial "side." Perhaps most importantly, the subject once considered "[one] that it is thought best for women to ignore," as an antebellum diarist once wrote, became one they could righteously declaim.[3] Once powerless in the face of such racial transgressions, white women could now declare themselves guardians of the racial boundaries. Such new power stemmed, paradoxically, from the antebellum "cult of domesticity."

Feminist historiography in the last few decades has attempted to complicate the notion of "separate spheres" and the "cult of domesticity" in the antebellum period by suggesting that women were active agents in the creation, assumption, and spread of the ideology. The very reason the "cult" was so widespread, historians like Nancy Cott, Ann Douglas, and Mary Ryan have argued, was because women were not its dupes or victims but rather participants in its

[3] Diary of Ella Gertrude Thomas, Jan 2, 1858, quoted in Williamson, *New People*, 68.

creation who received social and cultural power from its consequences.[4] As American capitalism, industrialization, and urbanization transformed American society, white men did not simply force women out of the public sphere and confine them to the private. Rather, women declared *themselves* the guardians of the family, religion, morality, and other traditional values that needed to be nurtured in a domestic sphere lest they come under attack by the aforementioned transformative forces. Such a role granted them a certain amount of power: it established their moral superiority to men and children, and thus a leadership role within the family as a moral guide, teacher, and protector. The ideology had the means to spread because a growing cohort of ministers and educated women took it upon themselves to publish these ideas in a plethora of periodicals, sermons, advice manuals and novels; an expanded literary public, including increasing numbers of women as well as men, proved avid consumers. Women thus also established a primary place within the American literary sphere. The themes of sentimentalism and domesticity that emerged in their writings transformed American culture itself: as contemporaries and modern historians alike remarked, it was increasingly "feminized."[5]

Such an influence, as this dissertation has shown, was directly opposed by certain men who ascribed instead to the culture of "aggressive masculinity," or at least to an idea of patriarchal power that refused to entirely relinquish authority to a female domestic head. After all, much of the historiography examining the spread of the antebellum "culture of sentimentality" by ministers and female writers focuses primarily on the Northeast. Other areas of the nation like the South and West, which were less industrial, urban, and capitalist but more racially stratified, were not such fertile grounds for the "cult of domesticity." For many decades, then, white women—especially those in the South and West—may have seen themselves as domestic leaders of the home, but the actual *police* power integral to the role had yet to be solidified. White women may have proclaimed themselves the guardians of family virtue, but white men determined the boundaries of the household and the relationships within it. In the South, a white man could keep a black mistress under the same roof as his white wife, and he could order his black children to either serve under or play among his white children. In the West, a white man could forego the comforts of a house and live in a tent with multiple Indian wives. He could choose to hide them when his white wife arrived, or simply refuse to abandon them. In the borderlands, a white man could choose to ally himself with a Mexican household, ascribing to a foreign variation of domesticity. In this way, non-white women were thus also contenders for a totally different kind of antebellum domestic ideal—one that stripped white women of agency.

The aforementioned changes occurring from the 1860s to the end of the century, however, served to solidify the eventual triumph of the "cult of domesticity" over the entire nation. This white female victory—verbalized as such by the women themselves—was possible because of the nationalist and imperialist implications of the "cult of domesticity." In her article

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[4] Cott finds a gray area between victimhood and agency, writing that "women were neither victims of social change—passive receivers of changing definitions of themselves—nor totally mistresses of their destinies." Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, 4.

[5] The arguments in this paragraph have been distilled from the major works on these issues, which include: Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*; Sklar, *Catharine Beecher*; Anne Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977); Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class;* Mary Ryan, *Empire of the Mother: America Writing about Domesticity, 1830—1860* (New York: Institute for Research in History and Haworth Press, 1982); Shirley Samuels, ed., *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

"Manifest Domesticity," Amy Kaplan points out a problematic gap within the historiography of the "separate spheres" ideology. By focusing primarily on the Northeast and on the boundaries of the home itself, scholars have "assumed that nationalism and foreign policy lay outside the concern and participation of women." The focus on the domestic sphere as a contrast to the market or political realm has tended to reinforce the idea that men and women inhabited entirely separate, often conflicting social worlds. When, however, the domestic is opposed to the foreign, "men and women become national allies against the alien, and the determining division is not gender but racial demarcations of otherness."[6] In this way, the nation becomes reimagined as the home, and both men and women take on the role of reinforcing its boundaries. They become allies in the maintenance of white, American "civilization" in the face of threats by non-white, "savage" outsiders.

The "cult of domesticity," therefore, is quite easily allied to the concept of "manifest destiny," which Kaplan notes was developed contemporaneously. During the antebellum period, she explains, violent confrontations with Mexicans, Europeans, and Indians reinforced the notion of the nation as a beleaguered home. Using the works of Catharine Beecher and Sara Josepha Howe, Kaplan shows that America's domestic literature was infused with the language of empire, nationalism, racial exclusion and white supremacy. She points to a kind of "manifest domesticity" that paralleled and complemented the male-driven "manifest destiny." Kaplan also uses these two examples to demonstrate the way female writers tended to view non-whites. While the "culture of sentimentality" infused American literature with anti-slavery tracts, calls for missionary work, and images of the "noble savage," the "cult of domesticity" was intrinsically racist and exclusionist. "Pagans," "heathens," and "savages" could only be subsumed into the American nation/home if they were Christianized and civilized. Hale, for her part, advocated abolition but considered blacks foreign: she wanted to send all free blacks to Liberia, thus barricading the walls of the nation against an entire race.[7]

Kaplan's arguments, however, focus entirely on the antebellum period—which, as this dissertation has shown, was very much a period of flux in terms of racial and gender hierarchies. Just as the ideology of "manifest destiny," popular in antebellum literature, was far more actively *realized* in the latter half of the nineteenth century by unprecedented waves of migration, so the ideas of "manifest domesticity" were only played out in later decades. The West was "won" from competing Indians, Mexicans, and Europeans around the same time as the Civil War was won by the North. At that time, both the South and West were rife with racial conflict and socially unstable. To varying degrees in varying regions, the "cult of domesticity" had for decades pervaded American literature, society, and culture. Its nationalist, white supremacist, and imperialist aspects—in other words, its real police power—now had wide applications. White women became the symbol of the necessity of segregation: their bodies were simultaneously portrayed as pure treasures that needed to be protected from dangerously sexual non-white men, and strong, superior instruments of virtue that spread civilization to the most beleaguered corners of the nation and buttressed the fortress of white superiority. The reason for this, surely, could

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[6] Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," *American Literature*, Vol 70, No 3 No More Separate Spheres! (Sep, 1998), 582, 583.

[7] The works by Beecher and Hale that Kaplan cites include: Catharine Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841); Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home* (1869); Various excerpts from Sarah J. Hale's *Godey's Lady's Book*; Sarah J. Hale, *Northwood: or, Life North and South: Showing the True Character of Both* (1852); Sarah J. Hale, *Liberia: or Mr. Peyton's Experiment* (1853); Sarah J. Hale, *Woman's Record* (1853).

not simply be the threat of male, non-white sexual predators—after all, that threat was relatively minimal. The true threat was, instead, the non-white *women* who had very real, very prevalent relations with white men. Those unions, their subsequent offspring, and even the memory of their long-standing tradition in American history, had to be suppressed.

Thus while major political, economic, and military changes spearheaded by men were taking place in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, white *women* declared themselves the only legitimate representatives of civilization, virtue, order, and progress— and thus the only suitable partners for white men. The "cult of domesticity," threatened by a newly freed race in the South and the presence of "savage," "uncivilized," or "vice-ridden" Indian and Spanish American neighbors in the West, proved an extremely powerful force in redefining racial boundaries. The white home became the *only* appropriate home for white men in America, and a white wife the only appropriate partner.

The New South, The New Negro

When the Civil War ended, a population of previously enslaved or otherwise degraded black Southerners found themselves—at least, *legally*—on the same social level as their former rulers. In order to preserve their power, whites needed to quickly remove any possibility of social mixing. With the collapse of Reconstruction, blacks in the South were systematically stripped of political, economic, and social rights, and relegated to a system that many felt was akin to slavery. One major difference, however, was that interracial mixing of *any* kind—whether between black men and white women, or white men and black women—was increasingly even more taboo. This certainly did not prevent white men from sexually harassing black women whenever they desired, but society increasingly frowned upon any relations that appeared to involve anything deeper than a kind of vengeful display of white sexual power. White men could and did rape black women, but any relationship resembling the antebellum period's systems of concubinage was socially excoriated and often legally prosecuted. The KKK, for example, attacked a number of white men who were suspected of sexual liaisons with black women.[8] Freedmen and women, too, were eager to enact barriers against interracial mixing after the war. Contrary to white fears, most black men felt a far more pressing need to protect their own women from the white men who had sexually terrorized them for centuries than to pursue white women. In fact, during Reconstruction, a number of black delegates to the state constitutional conventions supported anti-miscegenation laws, as long as they also covered the all-too-common phenomenon of extra-marital liaisons and cohabitation between white men and black women.[9]

As soon as southern state governments were reorganized, they moved to pass anti-miscegenation laws. South Carolina, whose black population actually outnumbered its white, had nonetheless never passed a law barring interracial relations—that is, until 1865, when its new legislature rushed to enact rigid racial barriers. It was swiftly followed by virtually all the former Confederate states, as well as border states like Maryland, Missouri, and Kentucky. The states that already had anti-miscegenation laws made them far more rigid, explicit, and punitive: Mississippi declared it a felony with a possible life sentence, while Alabama and Georgia placed

[8] Martha Hodes, "The Sexualization of Reconstruction Politics: White Women and Black Men in the South After the Civil War," in *American Sexual Politics: Sex, Gender, and Race Since the Civil War,* eds John C. Fout and Maura Shaw (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 70.

[9] Peter Bardaglio, "Families Sex, and the Law: The Legal Transformation of the Nineteenth-Century Household," Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1987, 79—83.

the laws directly in their new state constitutions.[10] Furthermore, court records show that, as the century wore on, white men were increasingly likely to be prosecuted. As Peggy Pascoe explains in her analysis of American miscegenation law, although "bans on interracial marriage conflicted with long-standing conceptions of White men's sexual freedoms and civil rights," the growing strength of the white supremacy ideology meant that it was increasingly likely "that White men would be subject to the full range of disabilities of miscegenation law. . . . Indeed by 1900, White men were nearly as likely as White women and Black men to run afoul of the laws."[11]

The various legal and cultural prohibitions against future miscegenation, however, could not erase past mixing. The massive population of mixed-race peoples in the South was testament to decades of interracial unions that could not simply be wiped out. Instead, the mixed-race population was now forced by both sides to choose. If white enough, many decided to "pass" into white society, hiding their "tainted" black roots forever. Others who could have "passed" decided instead to commit themselves to the plight of their darker relatives, hoping perhaps that they could assist in racial uplift. Many others, however, had no choice but to count themselves among the Negro population they had previously avoided. As the "one drop rule" became harshly enforced in America, the liminal third social category of mixed race peoples essentially began to disappear, dissolving into the binary system. As Joel Williamson explains in his comprehensive review of mulattoes in American history, by the early twentieth century "mulattoes led by the mulatto elite had allied themselves rather totally with the black world. Meanwhile the white world had arrived at an almost total commitment to the one-drop rule. In white eyes, all Negroes came to look alike."[12] In other words, the excuses given to mixed-race women who looked or acted exotically "near-white" no longer sufficed to make them socially tolerated partners for white men. If a darker taint was even barely noticeable, the relationship could come under social fire or even criminal prosecution. By 1868, then, the Carolina aristocrat William Heyward, could write his firm opinion that the reason "so lovely a climate, and country, with a people in every way superior to the Yankees should be overrun and destroyed by them" was due to "the judgment of the Almighty because the human and brute blood have mingled." As Williamson explains, many whites now saw mulattoes as living symbols not only of the South's

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[10] Ibid., 79—83; Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally,* 29—30.

[11] Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally,* 11. According to Joel Williamson, "observers during Reconstruction and afterward unanimously agreed that miscegenation between whites and Negroes greatly declined in frequency after the war." He provides data collected in a study by Caroline Bond Day begun in 1918 and completed in 1932. She compiled a mass of info on 345 mixed race families including 2,537 adults stretching back through history into the colonial period. She divided her subjects into those born before 1861 (Group 1) and those born after 1860 (Group 2). Group 1 included 1,152 people and 243 unions between whites and Negroes. Group 2 included 1,385 persons and only 3 unions. See: Williamson, *New People,* 88-89.

[12] Williamson explains that, during slavery, "publicly white people seemed unconcerned about white blood mixing with black," as long as the resulting offspring were enslaved. He argues that the "changeover" period occurred between the 1850s and 1910s, when Negro Americans stopped "pressing to enter the white man's world" and began "to build a world of their own . . . . [T]he mulatto elite gave up white alliances and picked up black alliances." He also posits that the transition in the 1850s occurred for a variety of reasons related to the "embattled," "tense, anxious, strung out society" of the South, *including* the element that makes up my own argument: women. "Profoundly anxious of dissent at home," as well as abolitionism, revolts among the slaves and the non-slaveholding class, Williamson writes that Southerners "were fearful of rebellion among their own women." See Williamson, *New People,* 62—74.

defeat, but also of a sexual act that had come to be seen as a sin, an abomination, and a form of treachery.[13]

The Not-So-Wild West

The new kind of racism that arose in the South following the Civil War found fertile ground in the American West, as well. There, the balance of power began to topple as well, though more slowly and with a wider range of events and processes. Put simply, the discovery of precious metals in various western territories and states, the end of the Civil War, and the passage of legislation promoting westward migration brought far more white settlers than Mexican or Indian. The land that had previously been negotiated and, through marriage, often shared between a scattering of white men and Mexican or Indian families came fully under Anglo-American control. In *Empires, Nations, and Families,* an examination of mixed-race families in the West, Anne Hyde places the theoretical "end" of her story—or, at least, of the various stories she tells of interracial western families successfully integrating into their respective communities—in 1860. Acknowledging that it is "an arbitrary moment to stop," she explains that it nonetheless serves as a marker for the construction of "the scaffolding of American conquest—railroads, armies, surveyors, reservations, censuses, and laws," as well as the time period in which "ideas about race and how it described people and circumscribed behavior" began to have "the power of the state to give them shape."[14]

The latter decades of the nineteenth century, in other words, were the time when Indians were rounded up onto ever-smaller reservations (or, with the passage of the Dawes Act in 1887, onto individual allotments that required tribal splintering); when the Indian Wars obliterated huge portions of tribes and placed millions of acres of Indian lands under federal control; when railroads, miners, surveyors, and other harbingers of American empire began snapping up those lands and encouraging white settlement; when Mexican families were disenfranchised and dispossessed of their land by American entrepreneurs, squatters, or even grasping American in-laws; and when new waves of migrants began leaving their poverty-stricken homes in northern Mexico to work in American-owned mines, ranches, or farms, creating transient communities that white Americans pushed to the outskirts of town. As these various, non-white communities became increasingly disempowered, losing land, money, prestige, and sometimes even the most basic rights of citizenship, the incentives for intermarriage rapidly dwindled.[15]

As whites increasingly relegated Spanish Americans, Indians, and blacks to segregated communities and inferior land, housing, schools, and social resources, it became easier to see them as naturally, inherently inferior. The ideology of scientific racism and white supremacy began to make a lot of sense to whites who consistently encountered these other races at the lowest, most degraded end of the social spectrum. Consequently, with the apparent "evidence" of scientific ideas about a biological hierarchy of races, the increasingly degraded, powerless communities of non-whites in America, and the almost total obliteration of a balance of power

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[13] Ibid., 92.

[14] Hyde, *Empire, Nations, and Families,* 497.

[15] Anne Hyde's book provides an interesting, personal perspective on these changes through the stories of the western families she follows. For more on the dislocation, disenfranchisement, and segregation of Indian and Mexican communities, see: Linda Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Edmunds, et al., *The People*; Riley, *Building and Breaking Families in the American West;* West, *The Contested Plains*.

wherein interracial unions ensured access to economic, social, or political power, anti-miscegenation laws swept the nation. As the South raised its legal barriers against its black population following the Civil War, western states like Nevada, Oregon, Idaho, Arizona, Wyoming, Colorado, California, and Nebraska either instituted or refined miscegenation laws by 1869.[16] By the end of the nineteenth century, at least 26 states, mostly in the South and West, had installed anti-miscegenation laws, and even most northern states had tried—though usually failed—to enact similar prohibitions.[17]

The western states perfected the art of multiplying racial categories. While most anti-miscegenation laws began by prohibiting marriage solely between blacks and whites, the large, multi-faceted racial spectrum that existed in the West caused the categories of targeted non-whites to rapidly proliferate. Many western states, for example, prohibited whites from marrying blacks, Chinese (or similarly "Mongolian"), kanaka (meaning Polynesian), or Indians. The laws became increasingly specific about the "one-drop" rule, as well, lumping most mixed-race people into the racial category of their non-white parent. Oregon, for example, prohibited marriage with "any person having one fourth or more negro, Chinese, or kanaka blood, or any person having more than one half Indian blood."[18] It took a bit longer for most western states to outlaw white marriages with Indians, especially those of mixed blood. This was partly because the latter population was quite numerous, the result of many decades of interracial mixing, and also because some well-known frontier founding fathers still possessed Indian families. By the 1890s, however, when a more firmly established western culture blatantly ostracized "squaw men" and when Anglo-American control of western land seemed indisputable, western courts began to treat white marriages to Indians as harshly as those to blacks. Interestingly, the drafters of the Virginia Racial Integrity Act, the most stringent anti-miscegenation law of the 1920s, attempted to institute a single exception to the rule that a white person was defined as having "no trace whatsoever of any blood other than Caucasian." The proposed exemption was "persons who have less than one sixty-fourth of the blood of an American Indian," and was intended to excuse Virginian dynasties like the Randolphs from their historic claim of descent from Pocahontas.[19] What was once a source of pride and legitimacy had become a tainted shame to be wiped away.

No law specifically outlawed white marriage to those of the Mexican race. For one thing, too many whites had married into the elite "Spanish" families, either during the period of Mexican rule or after the American takeover in order to speed the transition to American ownership. For another, race scientists found themselves unable to distill the "mongrel" components of the Mexican population into a single race. As scientific racism became increasingly accepted by the scholarly and scientific communities, as well as the general populace, a major purpose of the anti-miscegenation laws was declared to be the preservation of the "purity" of several so-called "original" races, especially the purportedly superior white race. But Mexicans confounded this classification system: some had white skin, fair hair, Spanish aristocratic titles, and vehement claims of pure, European descent. Some seemed very clearly to

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[16] Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, 29—30.
[17] Bardaglio, "Families, Sex, and the Law," 84; David Fowler, "Northern Attitudes Towards Interracial Marriage: Legislation and Public Opinion in the Middle Atlantic and the States of The Old Northwest," Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1963, 273. As Fowler explains, the North failed to implement such laws because northern courts—unlike state legislatures—remained relatively strict about preventing such blatant attacks on civil rights.
[18] Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, 77-78.
[19] Ibid., 98—104, 141-142.

possess African blood, but purported instead to be *mestizos*. The courts, therefore, never applied anti-miscegenation laws to someone they pronounced "Mexican," but they did prosecute a significant number of Mexican people who seemed suspiciously non-white. After all, Mexican *mestizos* and mulattoes did fall under the racial categories of "black" and "Indian."[20]

In previous eras, the presence of "Aztec" or otherwise tellingly dark blood could be viewed as somewhat exotic and romantic, a link to a glorified royal past that, if intermixed with enough white and "blue" blood, imparted rather than detracted from a Mexican's allure—especially a *señorita*. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, however, such women were increasingly subjected to the western variations on the "one-drop" rule and were prohibited from marrying into the white community. By the 1920s, Virginia's strict Racial Integrity Act had declared all Mexican people non-Caucasian, an incurably mongrelized mix of "Spanish or Portuguese, Indian and Negro."[21] Such distinctions seemed to become easier as the Mexican community experienced a similar phenomenon to the African-American population. Many Mexicans who claimed full European descent and who attempted to marry into Anglo-American families increasingly chose to blend in with white, American society and raise their children as English-speaking, East Coast-educated American citizens. Those whose racial traits caused whites to lump them in with the "mongrel" type of Mexican increasingly chose—or were forced—to live in the segregated Mexican communities that were annually flooded with more poor, mixed-race Mexican migrants.[22]

One could no longer be designated "mixed race" in America: in the stark "white" and "non-white" binary, one had to choose either invisibility within white society, or stark visibility in non-white communities. Even science itself began to deny the presence and viability of mixed-race peoples. As early as 1869, the Georgia Supreme Court convicted a black woman and a white man of violating the state's anti-miscegenation law by arguing that "the amalgamation of the races is not only unnatural, but is always productive of deplorable results. . . . [T]he offspring of these unnatural connections are generally sickly and effeminate, . . . inferior in physical development and strength, to the full-blooded of either race."[23] Nonetheless, the notion that some mixed-race people were slipping stealthily into white society whipped up a maniacal fear in early twentieth-century America of non-white people "passing" as white. Periodicals spread rumors and vigilante committees and "Anti-Miscegenation Leagues" sprang up all over the South and West.[24] Rather than being romanticized or portrayed as somewhat superior to full-blooded members of darker races, as had often been the case for mixed-blooded women, at least, in the first half of the nineteenth century, their very presence in succeeding decades was increasingly wiped from marriage records, scientific data, and even historical memory.

The Women's Crusade

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[20] Ibid., 121-122.
[21] Ibid., 122
[22] For examples of the "passing" of one Spanish American racial profile and the segregation of another, see Anne Hyde, *Empires, Nations, and Families,* 75—82, 497—512. For more on the segregation of Mexican migrant communities, see Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction,* 23—28, 121—122.
[23] Bardaglio, "Families, Sex, and the Law," 96.
[24] Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally,* 86—90; Abby Ferber, *White Man Falling: Race, Gender, and White Supremacy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 39—40.

None of this evidence, of course, proves that miscegenation in this period ceased entirely. First of all, the process was not completed overnight: in many parts of the West, for example, Mexicans and even some Indians continued to hold enough power to make intermarriage advantageous. In the South, though miscegenation decreased during Reconstruction, it was not until the period known as "Southern Redemption" in the late 1880s that Jim Crow laws and other manifestations of full-fledged white racism installed a stark, dangerous, practically immutable racial binary. Even during these later decades, of course, a number of people continued to cross racial lines in secret, or openly contested anti-miscegenation legislation in the courts.[25] Nonetheless, the trend was obvious: by the latter decades of the nineteenth century, miscegenation with *any* non-white person was politically and legally dangerous, economically disadvantageous, and extremely socially hazardous.

Why was this? Of course, aforementioned factors like law, science, and imperialism played significant, even primary roles in altering American attitudes. But anti-miscegenation laws were not new: they had existed in America since the earliest decades of European settlement. Racist scientific thinking was also not new: as this dissertation has shown, notions of the inferiority of non-white races extended all the way to initial contact. Even the hunger to place full power in the hands of whites does not seem reason enough to so harshly vilify miscegenation. After all, white men who pursued their female slaves already had that advantage, and yet the practice was prolific. In other words, as this dissertation has evidenced, political, legal, and economic restrictions did not prove strong enough in the early half of the nineteenth century to dissuade significant numbers of men from engaging in interracial liaisons. The reality is that American *society* simply proved tolerant enough—and, as contemporary literature exemplifies, often fascinated by—miscegenation. This apparent social liberalism, however, only extended to relations between white men and non-white women.

In the latter decades, political, legal, and economic restrictions tightened, but it was the American people's new set of social mores and controls that gave the other factors added power and immediacy, and made miscegenation an even greater sin, danger, and perversion. White women, especially, wielded their new social and cultural power as weapons against interracial unions and the "crisis of white femininity." Of course, very few—if any—would have phrased their actions in these words. They may have thought and spoken of their battle as being against the perceived rampant sexuality of black men, or against the endangerment of white racial purity, or against the apparent lawlessness and vice of the "wild" West. They may have spoken of their crusade as being one of "civilization" or "white supremacy." The reality, however, is that their influence ended—or at least significantly lessened—the "crisis" by making interracial sex of *any* kind, whether between men or women, full-blooded or mixed-blooded peoples, completely taboo. The southern women who cried "rape" and sent vicious vigilante mobs after black men were declaring themselves the symbol of white racial purity and supremacy, and therefore the *only* sexual option for a proudly white man. The white women who called for libraries, schools, and churches to be built in western towns, and who started temperance leagues and missionary groups for neighboring Mexican and Indian communities, were declaring themselves the symbol of civilization and "manifest destiny" (or, as Kaplan would have it, "manifest domesticity"), and

[25] Williamson, *New People,* 62. For a large array of court cases involving people contesting miscegenation laws from the 19th to the 20th centuries, see Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*.

thus the only suitable partners for white men who considered themselves models of Anglo-American progress.

Historian Barbara Welke has suggested that one of the reasons scholarly debate concerning the South's sudden increase in racism and segregation in the late 1800s has remained so contentious and perplexing is that it has largely ignored the issue of gender. She insists that historians "cannot understand Jim Crow without taking account of gender," since "any attempt to understand the post-emancipation South must begin by acknowledging one point: the unwavering goal of white Southerners was to protect white womanhood, the embodiment of the idea of the South."[26] Of course, historians have indeed pointed to the gender issue that seemed most central to contemporaries: what Leon Litwack calls the "specter of unrestrained black lust and sexuality" among newly freed and enfranchised black men.[27] Citizen's rights, especially the right to vote, were equated with masculinity itself. As masculinity was equated with sexuality, and black blood with *hyper*-sexuality, black enfranchisement came to be associated with the pursuit of white women, themselves the embodiment of Southern virtue and white supremacy. As Martha Hodes explains in her analysis of the sexualization of Reconstruction politics, segregation thus cut off black men from white women and disenfranchisement symbolically castrated them.[28] Nonetheless, Welke argues, while historians like Litwack and Hodes have incorporated perspectives on gender and sexuality into their arguments, they have ignored the role white women also played in denying status, respectability, and basic rights to black men *and* women.

For many years after the Civil War, Welke points out, "common carriers" like railroads allowed some upper-class or otherwise respectable black women to sit in the "ladies car" with white women. The only other passenger car, the "smoker," was acknowledged to be dirtier and more dangerous, filled with men and all sorts of low-class occupants. Yet beginning in the 1870s, black women—even those who were wealthy, educated, and upper-class—were barred from the ladies' car on account of their skin color. Interestingly, the majority of court cases challenging racial segregation in these years were brought by or involved black women rather than men. The denial of black women's right to be recognized as a "lady," and thus the relegation of all black women to a status connoting immorality and low class, stripped the entire race of social legitimacy.

The situation almost mirrored the slavery era, when black women were put to the same hard field labor as men under the presumption that they lacked true feminine delicacy. But, even then, light-skinned black women were often chosen as domestic slaves, their white blood a supposed marker of femininity. By the late nineteenth century, the "one-drop rule" had stripped even the lightest, most respectable black women of any such distinction. By the 1880s and 90s, Southern states were mandating racial separation of whites and blacks by statutes—not just because they feared black men's presence around white women, but also because white women denied their black sisters the right to share their physical or social space. "It is no coincidence," Welke explains, "that the move to statutory Jim Crow in the late 1880s and early 1890s occurred at the same time that Southern states moved to disenfranchise black men. . . . Statutory Jim Crow

[26] Barbara Welke, "When All the Women Were White, and All the Blacks Were Men: Gender, Class, Race, and the Road to Plessy, 1855-1914," *Law and History Review* 13, no. 2 (Autumn, 1995): 265, 274.
[27] Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: the Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 265.
[28] Hodes, "The Sexualization of Reconstruction Politics," 407—408.

was for women, the gender equivalent of disenfranchisement of black men"[29] Gone were the days of the Big House and the Little House, the quadroon balls and the concubine "house-keepers" who graced white men's carriages and opera boxes. White women equated black female degradation with black male degeneracy, and demanded—through social pressure, court cases, and other venues beyond the political arena—that the law eradicate the double sexual standard and protect whites of both genders from blacks of both genders.

While in the South white women stood as a symbol of a past great society valiantly attempting to re-establish its power and prestige, in the West white women felt the urgency and power to construct an entirely new society. In the early 1850s, when most of the women in California were Indian, Spanish American, or French (the latter predominantly prostitutes), forty-niner William Perkins found the arrival of a respectable, white, American woman a laughable occurrence. "What chance has virtue in the shape of tall, gawky, sallow, ill-dressed down-Easters," he wondered in his journal when he saw the arrival of a prominent townsman's wife, "in rivalship with elegantly adorned, beautiful and graceful vice." He thought it " too much to expect from weak male human nature in California, that a man ever so correctly inclined, should prefer the lean arm of a bonnetted, ugly, board-shaped specimen of a descendant of the puritans, to the rosy cheeked, full formed, sprightly and elegant [California women]."[30] Ironically, of course, Perkins would swiftly be proved very wrong. Western men would consistently "prefer the arm" of a white woman *despite* the lack of "rosy-cheeked," "sprightly" sexuality for the simple reason that white women offered social power that was systematically stripped from their non-white rivals.

Elizabeth Gunn, the "bonnetted, ugly, board-shaped specimen" herself, appeared blissfully unaware of men like Perkins as she celebrated the fact that California's men seemed to revere her presence and make her the belle of every social occasion. "I have never attended concerts and lectures as I have done here!" she wrote. "The folks are talking about a Lyceum and I hope it will be formed; it will be something to draw the young men from the gambling places and houses of ill fame which abound here. The reason we go to everything good is to set an example."[31] Clearly, Elizabeth Gunn felt that she had a duty to "civilize" the West—and one of the ways to do this was to remove white men from the influence of the dark-skinned ladies who tended to patronize the frontier gambling dens and brothels. She, and the white women who followed her as wives, missionaries, school-teachers, and hopeful bachelorettes were swiftly successful. Soon enough, even Perkins himself was cheerfully acknowledging the victory of the white women's influence. He declared "the epoch of flannel shirts" over, stating that "We now dress like Christians, and I smile to think of the change as I witness myself equipped in a silken lined cloth frock."[32]

As new legislation encouraged more families to migrate, as railroads made travel easier, as Indians were uprooted and chased away by federal troops, and as towns established by white frontiersmen began to seem safe enough to import female family members, white women began arriving in the West in ever-increasing numbers. In 1860, for example, California's gender ratio

[29] Welke, "When All the Women Were White, and All the Blacks Were Men," 267, 276, 278, 307, 312.
[30] Perkins, *Three Years in California*, 252.
[31] Elizabeth Gunn, quoted in Jeffrey, *Frontier Women*, 127.
[32] Perkins, *Three Years in California*, 299.

of men to women was 23:1; ten years later, it had drastically changed to 2:1.[33] Part of this transformation was due to men: newspaper articles, letters and journals began begging women to grace the frontier with their presence, and often specifically requested *single* women to address the needs of the West's bachelor hoards. The editor of the *Kansas Express,* for example, wrote an article requesting "one hundred [women] in this county, between the ages of 18 and 21, *who will pledge themselves to get married within one year."*[34] Asa Mercer, the founder of the University of Washington in Seattle, was so aware of the dearth of women in the West that he went East to recruit some 650 women as school-teachers. This, of course, was really only their nominal title—their true purpose was to provide wives for lonely western men, and they proved outrageously successful at it: all except one of Mercer's recruits found husbands.[35]

Women actively fostered this image of themselves as men's saviors and civilization's emissaries. As previously explained, it was antebellum female writers who first began to write about "manifest domesticity." For example, Catharine Beecher and Eliza Farnham were the first to propose the recruitment of white "schoolmarms" as educators, civilizers, and wives for Westerners. Beecher's *The Duty of American Women to Their Country,* published in 1845, came as close as any female publication to pointing out the "crisis of femininity." As one newspaper reviewer explained, the purpose of the schoolteacher recruitment proposed in Beecher's book was "to supply the bachelors of the West with wives, to furnish the pining maidens of the East with husbands, and to better equalize the present disposition of the sexes in these two sections of our country."[36] White women, of course, were not all so blissfully ignorant that they truly believed the single men out West to be *celibate.* It was for this very reason that Eliza Farnham, in her popular book about her own western crusade entitled *California, Indoors and Out,* declared that women's duty on the vice-ridden frontier was a "revolution" that would soon "inaugurate . . . a new and more hopeful state." Referring vaguely to the "influences from which [Californians] have hitherto suffered," and which had caused "such wanton waste of life and character"—in other words, gambling, alcohol, and unsuitable women—Farnham proclaimed white women's "war." The battle, she explained, would be "between the principles of good and evil," with virtuous white women leading the vanguard. "There is," she proclaimed, "redemption for California"—as long as white men welcomed rather than shunned the "bonnetted, ugly, board-shaped specimens."[37]

Of course, most western men envisioned the oncoming white women more like John Gast's golden, floating angel than Perkins's cruel representation. After all, the end goal of western settlement was to establish a civilization equal or even superior to that of the East Coast. As railroad tracks, telegraph lines, towns and cities began to criss-cross the nation, the era of the backwoodsman, the intrepid mountain-man, and the wild cowboy swiftly came to a close. Indian wives were certainly very helpful for men who profited from their knowledge of nomadic lifestyles, fur preparation, and the best ways to survive in harsh, unpeopled lands, but they were sharply out of place in white towns. Even respectable Mexican women began to seem awkwardly

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[33] Joan Jensen & Darlis Miller, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West," *Pacific Historical Review* 49, no. 2 (May, 1980), 189.
[34] *Kansas Express* quoted in Brown, *The Gentle Tamers,* 286. Original italics.
[35] Ibid., 231—236.
[36] *Boonville Observer,* August 12, 1847.
[37] Eliza Farnham, *California, Indoors and Out; Or, How we Farm, Mine, and Live Generally in the Golden State* (New York: Dix, Edwards, & Co, 1856), vii; Farnham herself does not mention the "bonnetted specimens." That aforementioned quote is from Perkins, *Three Years in California,* 252.

foreign in predominantly white settlements, where their Catholicism, modes of dress, language, food, and traditions contrasted sharply with the increasingly prevalent trappings of eastern civilization. In the early years, Indian or Mexican wives were practically necessary for white, American men who wished to live safely and profitably in Indian or Mexican territory. As the West increasingly came under the influence of East Coast America, only a white wife seemed to provide a man with the necessary prestige. White women, furthermore, often traveled in kin groups of immediate and extended families, and actively sought out the society of other whites. They recreated the social groups and institutions to which they belonged back East, like churches, schools, reform societies, concerts and balls. They sought to decorate their modest lodgings with eastern influences, adding flannel curtains to log cabin windows, knitting warm rugs, and filling their kitchens with stoves, cast iron cookware, china plates, and other goods increasingly available in frontier stores.[38]

As they established themselves as the markers of civilization, white women also played an instrumental role in constructing what historian Linda Gordon has titled a "colonial culture." As white settlements increasingly came to include men, women, and children, as log cabins and then wood frame houses began to replace hide tents or adobe buildings, and as churches, schools, and libraries sprung up beside old gambling houses, saloons, and brothels, Indians and Spanish Americans were pushed to the fringes. White women's influence "introduced sexual, familial, and domestic standards of respectability as demarcators of status," Gordon writes, focusing specifically on turn-of-the-century Arizona.

> It was women who fully spliced class status to whiteness. They stigmatized intermarriage and reduced its incidence, in a kind of gender contest by which they challenged Anglo men's patriarchal colonial privilege to marry and make 'white' their Mexican wives. They made *mestizaje* increasingly an embarrassment. Dress, etiquette, house furnishing, even to the point of luxury, began to define class and race position.[39]

As evidenced by historians like Amy Kaplan, Barbara Welke and Linda Gordon, such an influence existed throughout the nineteenth century in a variety of regions in the United States. It is time that historians synthesize these arguments, seeing them as recurring, national patterns of what Gordon calls the "unacknowledged force that women have exerted in constructing and defending race lines."[40] Attacks on the basic rights of non-white men must be seen in conjunction with the simultaneous, parallel attacks on those of non-white women; they must be acknowledged to be instigated by white men *and* women through channels beyond the official, documented, public and political sort to which scholars pay most attention.

Of course, such a thorough examination would also need to take into account the discrepancy noted throughout this dissertation between public action and private thought, true experience and romantic fantasy. Though the proposed synthesis is well out of the range of this

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[38] For more on the influence of women and the importation of eastern civilization to the frontier, see: Elizabeth Jameson, "Women as Workers, Women as Civilizers: True Womanhood in the American West," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 7, no 3 (1984): 1—8; Susan Armitage, "Women and Men in Western History: A Stereotypical Vision," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (Oct 1985): 381—395; Jeffrey, *Frontier Women;* Brown, *The Gentle Tamers*; Joan Jensen & Darlis Miller, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West," *Pacific Historical Review,* 49, no 2 (May, 1980): 173—213.
[39] Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction,* 183.
[40] Ibid., 307.

project, a brief analysis of the effect the aforementioned social changes wrought on literature provides an interesting perspective on the evolution of American culture, and highlights certain, recurring elements of the national imagination. The changes in literary culture were certainly in keeping with the transformations in society, but they also reflect the echoes of earlier trends of romantic exoticism that would regain widespread appeal in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Conclusion: The Literary Legacy

The "tragic mulatta," the "Pocahontas figure," and the fiery *señorita* prototypes did not suddenly disappear in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. In fact, they retained much of their appeal, remaining popular literary figures in a variety of genres and continuing to be presented as more beautiful and alluring than others of their race. What changed, however, was that their relationships with white men no longer took center-stage. They could and did still fall in love with white men, and the latter could certainly admit an attraction, but interracial sex was now just as taboo and dangerous a literary topic as a political and social one. Any writer who attempted to address the issue directly, making interracial relationships the story's primary love affair in the mode of previous decades, risked what one historian has called "censure or more violent repercussions."[1] While the themes of previous interracial romances varied from warnings of their inevitable, tragic end to suggestions of their potential to heal society's rifts to celebrations of their advantages for American imperialism, the vast majority of the later works had a single message: the "one drop rule" was a necessary reality, forcing mixed-race peoples to choose a "side" and forever forgo future transgressions.

The "tragic mulatta," for example, still fell in love with white men; for a while, she was still beautiful and noble, though by the latter decades she was also portrayed as a dangerous, hyper-sexual "vamp." Her relationships with white men, however, were increasingly off-stage. They had either occurred in an embarrassing past (during slavery) and resulted in tragedy and punishment for the rest of both transgressors' lives, or they were doomed to death or exile, or they were simply unrealized as both whites and blacks prioritized racial loyalty over romantic love.[2]

Three classic examples, all popular in their own time, are Bartley Campbell's 1882 play *The White Slave,* Francis Harper's 1892 novel *Iola Leroy*, and William Dean Howell's 1893 romance *An Imperative Duty.* Campbell's play solves the issue of interracial love by revealing that his protagonist, Lisa, is actually the pure white daughter of a wealthy plantation owner—she has only been mistaken for an octoroon and raised as a slave. In fact, the reader is made aware of this fact from the novel's earliest pages— thus the potential for the kind of titillation similar antebellum stories allowed by only revealing the racial truth at the story's end is canceled out. Lisa marries her white lover and, in fact, holds slaves of her own; she has so fully committed herself to a white identity that the subjugation of her former race comes naturally. Harper's *Iola Leroy* presents a similar message of racial alliance. Though Iola is an octoroon far superior to every other female character, white or black, and even though a white man actually proposes to her, she refuses. She explains that such a union would be contrary to her purpose of fully committing herself to her newly emancipated race, for whom she feels an intense duty. She

[1] Diana Paulin, "Representing Forbidden Desire: Interracial Unions, Surrogacy, and Performance," *Theater Journal*, 49, no 4 (December 1997): 417.

[2] For brevity's sake, this dissertation has only focused on a few, representative examples. For a much more in-depth exploration of the topic of interracial sex and the evolution of the "tragic mulatta" in the latter decades of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, see Kinney, *Amalgamation!* An analysis of the books presented in his work confirms the aforementioned plot summary.

chooses instead to marry a male octoroon, an extremely well-educated doctor who has also decided fully to identify with the Negro race and serve their needs.[3]

In Howell's *Imperative Duty*, the protagonist Rhoda is only one sixteenth black. Her lover, Dr. Olney, does in fact decide to marry her, but Howells is extremely careful to provide the reader with a number of excuses. First of all, he makes the reader very much aware of Rhoda's *performative* whiteness: not only does she look and act white, she finds blacks "repulsive in all . . . shades," the "mixed-bloods" even more so "because she felt herself more akin to them; but they were all abhorrent." Secondly, Rhoda chooses to fully "pass" into white society, completely forgoing all black alliances; at one point she even muses that she would like to "own" a little black waiter she finds "small and cunning," lamenting "isn't it a shame we can't *buy* them, Dr. Olney, like we used to?"[4] Finally, Howells appears to understand that, even though Rhoda has chosen her "side," many white audiences would abhor the notion of secret black blood hiding in their midst. He therefore moves Rhoda and Dr. Olney to Italy, safely out of the pool of true, pure, white American blood. In all three novels, black women and white men who transgressed racial boundaries during the slavery era—even if they were the devoted caretakers or parents of the protagonist—suffer tragic ends, dying of murder, suicide, illness or heartbreak. The message is clear: miscegenation was a sin of the past that caused the tragedy of the present. The future, therefore, must avoid it at all costs.[5]

The "tragic mulatta's" storyline and purpose had drastically changed. The romantic idea of her no longer posed a threat either to white female characters in the books—to whom they were now very rarely presented as rivals—nor to the concept of white marriage itself, which was acknowledged to be the sole means of securing white supremacy. At the same time, however, the kind of racial eroticism that pervaded the earlier literary genre was very much in play. "Tragic mulattas" did not suddenly become repulsive, and white male characters often struggled with their sexual or romantic feelings for them. In *An Imperative Duty,* for example, Dr. Olney admits that Rhoda's primary draw is the fascinating allure of her almost—but not quite—invisible racial stain. Explaining that Rhoda's allure was simultaneously savage and graceful, repulsive and loveable, spiritual and animal, Olney feels that

> [T]he remote taint of her servile and savage origin gave her a kind of fascination which refuses to let itself be put in words: it was like the grace of a limp, the occult, indefinable loveableness of a deformity, but transcending these by its allurement in infinite degree, and going for the reason of its effect deep into the mysterious places of being where the spirit and the animal meet and part in us.[6]

Even the most heinously racist of writers, such as the exceedingly popular Timothy Dixon Jr., admitted to black women's allure—though to Dixon, this was a danger that needed to be fully conquered before the South could regain its past glory. Along with sex-crazed black

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[3] Bartley Theodore Campbell, "The White Slave," in Napier Wilt, ed., *The White Slave & Other Plays* (1911; repr., Princeton University Press, 1941); Francis Harper, *Iola Leroy: or, Shadows Uplifted* (Boston: James H. Earle, 1895).
[4] William Dean Howells, *An Imperative Duty* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893), 93, 56
[5] For more scholarly analysis of the interracial plots of these three stories, see: Paulin, "Representing Forbidden Desire;" Debra Rosenthal, "The White Blackbird: Miscegenation, Genre, and the Tragic Mulatta in Howells, Harper, and the 'Babes of Romance'" *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 56, no. 4 (March 2002): 495-517; Kinney, *Amalgamation!*
[6] Howells, *An Imperative Duty*, 133.

male rapists, Dixon presents mulatta "vamps" who act as evil succubae. Lydia Brown, the mulatta mistress of Austin Stoneman in *The Clansman,* is described in vaguely similar ways to Howell's Rhoda. She is a "a woman of extraordinary animal beauty," a "tawny leopardess," a "yellow vampire" whom Stoneman grieves has drawn him "into the black abyss of animalism."[7] In *The Sins of the Father,* the white Major Norton finds himself simultaneously repulsed by and obsessed with the octoroon Cleo who works in his house. He even labels the part of himself that cannot resist "the silent and deadly purpose" of "this sleek, sensuous young animal" "The Beast," insisting that his sexuality is something totally separate from and uncontrolled by his rational self. Such an excuse makes complete sense to the family doctor, who tells him that this fatal attraction is "an old story. The more powerful the man the easier his conquest when once the female animal of Cleo's race has her chance. . . . [M]y boy, with that young animal playing at your feet, in physical touch with your soul and body in the intimacies of your home, you never had a chance."[8] In this way, Dixon exonerates all Southern white men from the transgressions of earlier periods, blaming it on the black Jezebel's powers of seduction. Though Dixon's primary message is that such relations are evil, the result of centuries of sin that can only be erased if white men find the courage to deny black women their desires, his unintended message is that this interracial attraction is deep, almost uncontrollable, ever-present, and totally understandable.

Indian women in the literature underwent a similar transition to the "tragic mulatta." They, too, were denied a central romance with a white man, and were forced either to pine after them or dutifully to marry men of their own race. Yet while "tragic mulattas," despite their controversial connotations, remained quite prevalent in literature, Indian women were increasingly relegated to the status of secondary or peripheral characters. "By the 1850s," Robert Berkhofer argues in his literary analysis *The White Man's Indian,* "the Indian in general and the Noble Savage in particular began to bore the sophisticated reading public." When they did appear, it was usually in satires or burlesques of the earlier genres, or in the unsophisticated, mass produced, but astonishingly popular medium of the dime novel western.[9]

The comedies primarily targeted the Pocahontas legend. Increasingly in the 1860s, perhaps in a postwar attempt to discredit southern pride, a number of scholars and historians devoted themselves to debunking the story. Calling Smith a liar and a charlatan, these scholars also unearthed Governor William Strachey's unfortunate description of the young princess as a "wanton young girl" and decided that Pocahontas was no better than "an impish and not very well-behaved little squaw."[10] Although she still occasionally appeared in poems and paintings, Pocahontas's esteemed place in literature and theater plummeted soon after the war. Periodicals throughout the country seemed to exult in attacking her.[11] The *San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin* declared her "just a savage of the ordinary kind, and Rolfe a man of "some ambition and

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[7] Thomas Dixon Jr., *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1905), 57, 163, 371.
[8] Thomas Dixon Jr., *The Sins of the Father: A Romance of the South* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912), 37, 118, 121.
[9] Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian,* 95-96.
[10] Hubbell, "The Smith-Pocahontas Story in Literature," 279-281; Quote from: "Pocahontas Attacked," *New York Times*, September 1881: 2.
[11] For a comprehensive list of such periodicals dating from 1865 to 1910, as well as their pertinent quotes, see: Edward J. Gallagher, "The Pocahontas Archive," History on Trial, in the Lehigh University Digital Library: http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/trial/pocahontas/bib.php?query=&query1=0&category=&date1=1865&date2=1910&submit=Submit.

few scruples," who used her for financial and political gain. The *Arizona Weekly Journal* wrote that the revelation of Pocahontas as nothing but a "wanton" may have knocked the "poetry" out of the beloved legend, "but for what we in Arizona know of the Indian maiden as she is, lewd, lousy and lazy, we are disposed to believe it." Pocahontas, the writer scathingly claimed, "was probably one of [the] 'dusky maidens,' such as hang about the store at Mojave, La Paz and Arizona City, and earn a livelihood -- well, we won't say how."[12] The public, apparently, no longer wanted to be duped by the pretense that Indians were anything other than savages and squaws. Although Pocahontas' legend remained in many children's books, some of the most popular stories and plays about her around the turn of the century were comic operas, burlesques, and satires.[13]

As the dime novel western came to dominate the field of frontier literature, the beautiful, noble Indian princess worthy of a white hero's love gave way to a new plot in which she could play no primary, romantic role. In the new western genre, firmly established by 1860, the standard formula dictated that "lawlessness and savagery must recede before the vanguard of White society, of which the town and particularly the educated White woman are the prime symbols."[14] Indian women had no place in a society newly dominated by white femininity. They were not the stories' primary villains; that role was generally reserved for Indian or Mexican men, who reveled in capturing innocent white women. Because of their existence on the fringes of white settlement, Indian women also did not generally play the role of the promiscuous, passionate foil to the virtuous Anglo female; that role was usually reserved for Spanish American women who lived alongside the white community. Instead, Indian women were either invisible, silent in their villages as their warriors terrorized settlements, or they appeared as "morally neutral children of Nature" and "forest maidens of mysterious origins."[15] One example is twelve year-old Monima in Horatio Alger's *Frank and Fearless: or, the Fortunes of Jasper Kent*, who assists Jasper with his canoeing skills and saves him from an attack by her people. Though Jasper gratefully gives her a picture of himself, which she treasures, the white hero seems totally oblivious to her harmless puppy love.[16]

One reason Indian women may have faded from story pages is because of the disappointment so many whites reported upon encountering what they labeled "real" Indian women in the West—a disillusionment that seemed to be validated by scholars' reports on the "real" Pocahontas. "All this time I have been looking for the ideal 'Indian maiden,'" Charles Carlton wrote in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Magazine* in 1889. "I wanted her to be graceful, and I wanted to see the 'finely molded brown arms' that I had read about so often in Fenimore Cooper's novels. I even hoped to find another Pocahontas." Instead, he reported, "I could only discover a lot of pigeon-toed, flat-nosed, unattractive-looking squaws." The satirist Bill Nye mocked the eastern frontier romance audiences, announcing in his 1888 spoof *Bales of Hay: A Drier Book than Walt Whitman's 'Leaves o' Grass,'* his "desire to call the attention of those who love and admire the Indian at a distance of 2,000 miles. . to the crooked-fanged and dusky bride

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[12] "True Story of Pocahontas: Romantic Legend of the Virginian Princess—The Illusion Dispelled," *San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin*, December 1869; "Pocahontas," *Arizona Weekly Journal* [published as *Arizona Miner*], 23 March 1867, 2.
[13] Hubbell, "The Smith-Pocahontas Story in Literature," 294.
[14] Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian,* 97.
[15] Daryl Jones, *The Dime Novel Western* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1978), 147.
[16] Horatio Alger, *Frank and Fearless: or, the Fortunes of Jasper Kent* (Philadelphia: John C Winston Co., 1897).

of old fly-up-the-Creek." That same year, Lieutenant W.H. Chatfield wrote in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Magazine* that "the poetical Indian maiden" was essentially extinct in great literature and on the frontier, existing only "in the vivid imaginations of the extreme youth."[17] Indeed, even poetry had turned against her: by 1900, an excerpt from *Prairie Poems* mockingly presented this "beauteous queen" as "a yellow daisy, slouchy and lazy," with hair "like reeds, bespangled with beads" and "bug feet that toe in.

> You can scent her afar, she smokes pipe or cigar,
> Her teeth are yellow and her hands like tar,
> The romance of this belle I'm loth to dispel
> But there's no viler hag a human tongue doth
> wag.

The poem ends by insisting such a savage live well outside civilization, preferably "In the Bad Lands afar" where "there marauders are," for "'Tis a most fitting place for a damned race."[18]

Wanton, ugly, pigeon-toed, dirty, promiscuous and damned, the Indian woman suffered a fall from grace in the century's final decades, symbolized by the cigar store squaw. Rather than being depicted as the gorgeous, raven-haired nymph of old, or even the sweet, innocent "child of Nature," the crude wooden sculptures gracing stores from East to West coast were dark-skinned with coarse, "primitive" features, thick limbs, papooses on their backs, and even sometimes notches on their hips where store patrons could irreverently light their matches.[19] Nonetheless, the fact remains that the men complaining about "real" Indians in the 1880s and 90s still possessed an *ideal* of Indian women's allure that retained a powerful hold on the national imagination. Clearly, it was considered taboo—or at least ridiculous—to give Indian heroines their former romantic status. Nonetheless, the beautiful, noble Indian maiden still managed to gain a slight foothold in the literary world as books about ancient Indian legends became increasingly popular at the turn of the century. In these books, Indian history and religion were presented as myths, and the magnificent and mysterious Indian maiden reappeared in a "safe" setting of a mythical, magical past without white people, where her lovers were all Indian gods or men.[20] It seems that the "real" Indian in most Americans' minds came to be associated with savagery, dirtiness, and eventual extinction. Nonetheless, the *idea* of the wild, beautiful "noble savage" still held a strong enough appeal that literature could suggest a kind of golden era prior to Europeans' arrival, when North American natives possessed the sort of glory associated with South America's Aztec, Mayan, and Incan empires. Within this mythical past, the Indian woman could be safely admired and even desired.

A prime example of this new style of titillating, alluring Indian women is the character of Londiaw in Simon Pokagon's book, *Queen of the Woods.* A member of the Potawatomi tribe, Pokagon was a well-known speaker and published writer who advocated for Native American rights. He was also a popular attraction at the Chicago World's Fair, where people flocked to glimpse the "Last Chief" of his tribe. The experience apparently inspired Pokagon to write a

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[17] Charles Carlton, "Into Oklahoma with the Boomers," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly,* July 1889, 6; Bill Nye, *Baled Hay: A Drier Book that Walt Whitman's 'Leaves o' Grass* (Chicago: Belford, Clarke, & Co, 1888), 104; Lieutenant W.H. Chatfield, "The Peaceful Crows, *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly,* November, 1889, 535.
[18] F.D. Dibble, *Prairie Poems and Others* (New York: F. Tennyson Neely Co., 1900), 144-146.
[19] Rayna Green, "The Pocahontas Perplex," 711-712.
[20] For examples of this, see listed works in Gallagher, "The Pocahontas Archive."

story very much in the style of an Indian legend that he nonetheless claimed was autobiographical.[21] Lonidaw, his wife and the story's title character, is an Indian heroine of the classic antebellum variety: young, ravishingly beautiful, athletic, and blessed with miraculous woodcraft abilities and a talent with animals, Pokagon repeatedly describes her in blatantly sexual ways. When he first sees her, she stands "so close that [he] can see her bosom swell at every breath. . . . Perfect she appears in make and mold of body and of limb. Her ruby lips stand just apart, exposing teeth of perfect make and white as snow. Her dark eyes [are] full of soul . . . ."[22] Of course, any titillation the reader might enjoy from such a description is not threatening, as Lonidaw loves only Pokagon, has never been in contact with whites, and fears them. As with many late nineteenth-century "tragic mulatta" stories, the reader is therefore permitted to admire the safe intra-racial love affair between two "noble savages" from afar, and thus celebrate the sanctity of racial boundaries while denying any fantasies of transgression.

The *señorita* character still threatened the racial boundaries more directly than Indian maidens or "tragic mulattas," though by the latter decades of the nineteenth century her power in literature was also fading fast. While the other two female prototypes rarely came into contact with white women in the later literary works, the *señorita* was purposefully juxtaposed against the character Emerson Hough wrote in 1921 had come to be "the chief figure of the American West" and "the great romance of all America—the woman in the sunbonnet."[23] Young, fair-skinned, fair-haired, and usually a farmer's daughter, a schoolmistress, or perhaps a seamstress or assistant in a town's fledgling store, the angelic white woman faced two primary foes in the heyday of western literature: her male kidnapper and her female foil. While her captor could be an Indian warrior, a Mexican bandit, or even a white outlaw, her female antagonist was almost always Spanish American—and almost always much closer to home, living in the white woman's own settlement and lusting after her own, white hero.[24]

Most literary scholars agree that the fiery *señorita* of earlier years devolved into two far flatter characters: the Castilian noblewoman and the lascivious "half-breed siren"[25] Such a distinction has primarily been attributed to the enduring presence of old, generally wealthy, light-skinned Mexican families claiming pure Spanish descent and noble blood, and the continuing influx of migrant workers from the poorer parts of Mexico—the mongrel "greasers" that Americans segregated into *barrios.* Turn-of-the-century authors like Mark Twain, Bret Harte, Gertrude Atherton, and Helen Hunt Jackson utilized the former stereotype in their new style of frontier literature. A nostalgic memory of an earlier, aristocratic West, this popular romantic

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[21] See "Publisher's Notes" in Simon Pokagon, *Queen of the Woods* (Hartford, Michigan: C.H. Engle, Publisher, 1899), 5—35.

[22] Ibid., 66.

[23] Emerson Hough, *The Passing of the Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921), 93.

[24] Jones, *The Dime Novel Western*, 142-145. One indication of the change of interest from non-white to white heroines is in the new kinds of titles that appeared from the 1860s on. Like earlier dime novels, they often focused on women, but this time the heroines were quite obviously white. Some examples include: Percy Bolingbroke St. John, *Queen of the Woods: or, the Shawnee Captive* (1868); Frederick Whittaker, *Boone, the Hunter: or, The Backwoods Belle* (1873)*;* Joseph Edward Badger, *The Border Renegade: or, The Lily of the Silver Lake* (1872)*;* Prentiss Ingraham, *Bill's Blind Trail: or, Mustang Madge, the Daughter of the Regiment* (1892)*;* Edward Lytton Wheeler, *A No. 1, the Dashing Toll-Taker; or, the Schoolmarm o' Sassafras* (1883).

[25] Various scholars who discuss the juxtaposition of the "light" and "dark" Mexican women include: Arthur Petit, *Images of the Mexican American in Fiction and Film* (Texas A&M University Press, 1980); Jones, *The Dime Novel Western*; Evangelina Enríquez and Alfredo Mirandé, *La Chicana: the Mexican-American Woman* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Pisarz-Ramirez, "Blurring the Boundaries of Gender."

genre came to be known as the "California idyll."[26] In these stories, the Castilian woman was still permitted to marry the white hero, as long as no white female character existed. She, however, differed quite drastically from the old variety of "Spanish" noblewomen because she was required to have entirely untainted white blood, to be educated (preferably in America), to speak perfect English, and to serve as a demure, virtuous wife who would dutifully hand over the title deeds of her family's hacienda and agree to renounce virtually all ties to her foreign past.[27]

It was in the figure of the promiscuous "half-breed" that the sexual, aggressive, and passionate characteristics of the *señorita* of old emerged—indeed, these attributes took full control of the character and twisted her into a perversion of femininity. In the usual plot formula involving this new type of "dark lady," she is introduced as a licentious siren who aggressively lusts after the white hero. Possessing attractive, if rather barbaric, dark looks, she succeeds in tempting him to a certain degree, but he ultimately denies her and chooses the path of virtue by marrying the calm, cool-blooded, chaste and moral white woman. Sometimes, the "dark lady" fades out of the picture, doomed to a life as a "fallen woman" and hedged in by the oncoming forces of virtuous, white civilization. Most often, however, the passionate *señorita* flies into a dangerous, jealous rage and teams up with one of the non-white male villains to exact revenge on the happy couple. Such a development ensures either that she will pursue romance with a man of her own race, or will die at the close of her vengeful quest. Westerns did not flinch from killing such debased characters, though white men were never the perpetrators: they either died by suicide, in a bandit fray, or by the hand of their villain lover.[28]

While the "tawny leopardess" varietal of the "tragic mulatta" and the "dirty squaw" type of Indian maiden were not major components of their respective literary traditions, the evil (or at least amoral) "siren" became the most enduring literary image of Spanish American femininity. As the nineteenth century came to a close and the early decades of the twentieth unfolded, Spanish American women of any category—whether the "Castilian noblewoman" or the "half-breed greaser"—were increasingly denied literary romances with white heroes. Instead, their primitivism and sexuality became even more pronounced. In Atherton's short story, "A Ramble With Eulogia," the title character is a dangerous siren despite her pure, Spanish, aristocratic blood. She has "cold brilliant eyes," a "large mouth . . . as red as the cactus patches, and "flame[s] burn[ing] in either cheek." With no intention to take a husband, she simply toys with suitors' emotions and breaks the hearts of several Americans as easily as her Mexican lovers. "Thou hast a power over men which thou must use with discretion," her priest tells her as she confesses her sins, but the "ice-hearted little devil's" response is only "I wish to do harm, my father."[29]

In *The Conquest* of *Don Pedro*, which takes place in New Mexico in the years following the American Civil War, Harvey Fergusson's "Castilian noblewoman" is almost indistinguishable from his "half-breed siren." When the main character, the American storekeeper Leo Mendez, first meets Doña Lupe Vierra, he feels only a respectful appreciation of her elegance, beauty, and aristocratic status, never dreaming that the married, wealthy woman

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[26] Cecil Robinson, "The Extended Presence: Mexico and its Culture in North American Writing, *Melus* 5, no 3, (Autumn 1978): 9-10.
[27] Petit, *Images of the Mexican American in Literature and Film,* 37-40, 68-74.
[28] Jones, *The Dime Novel Western,* 144-145, 158; Petit, *Images of the Mexican American in Literature and Film,* 37-40, 63.
[29] Gertrude Atherton, "A Ramble with Eulogia," *The Splendid Idle Forties: Stories of Old California* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1902), 215, 220.

would flirt with him. Soon enough, however, he learns that she has "been building up desire in him for months, slowly and artfully," and a "final hard thrust" of her body against his during a dance they share at a *baile* convinces him of her "attack." Fergusson directly attributes Lupe's shockingly seductive aroma, looks, and gestures to her "class and race," for, as he says, those were women "for whom sex had been their whole profession and relation to life for centuries, and they had made an art of it and of every phrase of it, from the first faint smile of flirtation to the final spasm." Though Lupe is married, Fergusson writes that "no one pretended that monogamy was a working institution" in New Mexico," which was why "officers of the United States Army had affairs with ladies of the first families and the conquerors enjoyed a delicate blend of moral superiority and voluptuous delight." Clearly, Leo—or, at least, Fergusson himself—was well aware of the plethora of travel literature that described such relations. Indeed, Fergusson writes that Leo Mendes was not in the least surprised by Lupe's flirtations because he, like "everyone," had "read Josiah Gregg's book about New Mexico," and its "dry observation[s]" about marriage among the populace. Totally disregarding Lupe's claims to Spanish and aristocratic blood, Mendes thus lumps her in with the Mexican "greaser" variety. Deep down, Fergusson explains, Mexican women are all the same, and when Lupe sheds her clothes to be with Leo she also "shed[s] her whole social personality" and becomes "another creature, all desire, pure and shameless."[30]

Dolores Piño, half Navajo and half Mexican, is the extreme version of the "half-breed siren" in Fergusson's book, but she has devolved to such an extent that her sexuality is as raw and bestial as a wild animal's. Fergusson describes an exceptionally graphic sex scene in which Dolores "made a continuous guttural sound deep in her throat" when Leo "stripped and mounted her." "It seemed," Fergusson writes, "to have in it nothing of her usual voice or of any human voice but to be a subhuman music of desire, of the pure and innocent lust that is common to man and beast." The Mexican women of Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flats* are described in similarly animalistic ways, recalling Dixon's portrayals of mulatta succubae. Not one of the women has a strong, true marriage, and all aggressively pursue men, lying, cheating, stealing and sometimes even attacking them. The youngest, Dolores Engracia Ramirez, has a sexuality so strong it possesses her like an animal spirit. "It was a pleasant thing to see her when the beast in her was prowling," Steinbeck writes. "How her voice purred drowsily! How her hips moved gently about, now pressing the fence again!"[31]

Clearly, Mexican women still held just as powerful and enduring an allure for white men as Indian and black women. Society may have built the racial levees so solidly and so high that a breach was a dangerous affair, and literature may have superficially buttressed these barriers by drastically simplifying or vilifying its non-white female characters and denying them interracial romance, but the power of sexual *attraction* remained. In his work *Images of the Mexican American in Literature and Film,* Arthur Petit argues that the presence of the Mexican woman in nineteenth-century American fiction "reveals a profound social and psychological contradiction on the part of her creators.

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[30] Harvey Fergusson, *The Conquest of Don Pedro* (1954; repr., Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1974), 104, 107, 115.

[31] Ibid., 67; John Steinbeck, *Tortilla Flats* (New York: Penguin Books, 1935), 98-99. These examples were first presented in Enríquez and Mirandé, *La Chicana: the Mexican-American Woman* (1979). For more on the enduring image of the *señorita* in the twentieth century, see: Pike, *The United States and Latin America;* Robinson, "The Extended Presence;" Daniel Cooper Alarcón, *The Aztec Palimpset.*

> On the one hand most writers persuaded themselves that women of truly dark skin—the halfbreed 'harlots'—ought to be avoided and had to be renounced. On the other hand, these same writers allowed their highly principled Saxon heroes to experience more or less conscious cravings for mixed blood women. . . . Hence they must be attracted by the very racial mixture which they are compelled to repudiate. . . . [The "dark lady"] bears testimony to the fact that her creators were trying to have it both ways: to satisfy the prescribed color code while teasing 'white' readers with ill-disguised 'brown' women of undisguised sexuality. Thus, the dark lady has provided writers and readers alike with titillation *and* conventional morality in a way that was denied the all-American white heroine until recently.[32]

Such an observation can be applied to all "dark ladies" in American fiction, whether "tragic mulattas," Indian maidens, or passionate *señoritas,* from the nineteenth to the twentieth to the twenty-first century. A kind of orientalism has consistently pervaded the national imagination, ascribing exciting, sexual, exotic, gender-defying and sometimes even inhuman or supernatural attributes to non-white women. These fantasies persisted despite slavery, wars of conquest, political, social, and scientific racism, anti-miscegenation legislation, strict cultural regulations, and the various, often invisible battles waged by white women in the name of "civilization" and "virtue." They persisted despite laws and social taboos in the antebellum period, appearing regularly in southern and western institutions as well as literature. They endured despite the collapse of these institutions and the imposition of harsh restrictions from the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth. And they reappeared, fully-fledged, in the twentieth century's latter decades, amidst the destruction of racist laws and the success of various non-white civil rights movements.

In his work *The United States and Latin America,* Frederick Pike argues that many male American readers felt a certain draw to Spanish American and Indian characters because they symbolized "uncurbed sexuality," a "return to nature," and a freedom from the "chaf[ing] social restraints" that characterized middle-class, Protestant American culture. For this reason, he explains, these characters (and, I would argue, black female characters as well), "became a choice object of carnal fantasies"—at least until the Sexual Revolution. Then, Pike writes, "America's most ballyhooed counterculture rendered the [fantasy of the non-white woman] superfluous in the 1960s. That was when American women began to act out the roles that male fantasies had once assigned to the dark-eyed and erotic Other."[33] Such an argument appears to complement Petit's assertion that the "all-American white heroine" was denied a certain sexual appeal "until recently"—and, indeed, modern literature allows white women a whole range of gender and sexual roles once reserved only for men or non-whites.

What with the rapid rise of interracial relationships and marriages in America, the exponential growth of a mixed-race population, and the apparent erosion of a cultural boundary between the ideals of virtuous, chaste white women and passionate, hypersexual non-whites, one might imagine that the issues examined in this dissertation are rapidly disappearing from the nation's legal, social, and cultural records. Instead, however, an interesting paradox has occurred: with interracial relations increasingly common, open, and celebrated, and with women now demanding to define their own place in America's sexual culture, the images of the exotic,

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[32] Petit, *Images of the Mexican American in Literature and Film,* 79.
[33] Pike, *The United States and Latin America,* 28.

sexy, fascinating non-white women have proliferated. Their appeal clearly extends beyond the white community, and has been transformed by America's varying people of color into a source of pride and identity. American celebrities like Jennifer Lopez, Rhianna, Beyoncé, Salma Hayek, and even the Disney production company have capitalized on the old stereotypes. They are now presented in ways that highlight a proud heritage and purposefully contrast with, say, the fair, frail, porcelain looks of a Gwyneth Paltrow or Nicole Kidman, or the deceptively childish, innocent images projected by a young Britney Spears, Katy Perry, or Taylor Swift. These new, consciously projected images modernize old descriptions like "voluptuous," "passionate," "soulful," "warm" and "alluring" into "bootilicious," "curvacious," "hot," "horny," and "sexy."

Finally, the allure of these images has also extended beyond the white *male* community, leading modern white women to actually imitate them. Tanning beds and bronzing sprays promise the richly dark—but not too dark—complexions that used to connote deep-seated passion; hair dyes, colored contacts, and makeup offer women a whole range of beauty palettes once associated with exotic races; fashion incorporates tribal patterns, animal prints, Aztec-style jewelry, and beaded moccasins that once contrasted so sharply with corsets and calicos. Women's magazines like *Cosmopolitan, Glamour, Vanity Fair* and *Vogue* not only present women with advertisements of products that will enable them to assume the allure of an Indian princess, an African queen, or a Mexican *señorita,* but also decorate their covers with images of non-white celebrities as idols to admire and emulate.

Contemporary American culture has not done away with the dark/light lady paradigm—it has built upon, highlighted, and capitalized on it. The exotic allure of the female racial "Other," with a surprising number of her vintage traits intact, remains eminently marketable. Through the endless options provided by popular culture, advertising, and consumer products, men and women of all backgrounds can transgress racial boundaries in a variety of unprecedented ways. On the one hand, this dissertation has therefore been a story of *agency* rather than of oppression and restriction. It has highlighted the power certain men and women of various races had at particular times in American history to create or destroy racial categories, build or break racial boundaries, and reject or incorporate racial stereotypes. On the other hand, this is a story with no definitive end: the fact that certain sexual, gendered stereotypes still surround non-whites, even though a level of agency is now involved, continues to be problematic. Perhaps the biggest indicator of a continuing dilemma in American society is the fact that, despite all the aforementioned commercial and pop-cultural images, the statistics that point to an increase in interracial marriage, and the visible presence of a growing mixed-race population, interracial relationships are still shockingly rare in popular American movies, television shows, books or advertisements. Such a stark divide between reality and fantasy, public and private life, legal and cultural worlds appears to be as constant a factor in American history as the division between the proverbial "White" and "Racial Other." Locating the origin of these conflicts, tracing their evolution, continuing to acknowledge and question their presence, and committing to eradicating them is a daunting—but very necessary—stage in modern American racial relations.

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