

MIXED RACE CAPITAL: CULTURAL PRODUCERS AND ASIAN AMERICAN MIXED
RACE IDENTITY FROM THE LATE NINETEENTH TO TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Abstract

This dissertation traces and connects the contemporary scholarship of Asian American racial mixing to a longer historical story or genealogy, thematizing the stories of racial negotiation and mixed race capital by focusing on four Asian American mixed race cultural producers from the late nineteenth to twentieth century—bohemian poet and lecturer Sadakichi Hartmann, writer Winnifred Eaton, actress Merle Oberon, and musician Bardu Ali. Against the grain of discourses that proclaim the “birth” of multiraciality in the 1990s, this dissertation demonstrates that being racially mixed was an identity, a career, and an economic survival tactic that was stitched into the United States cultural fabric beginning as early as the late nineteenth century. This was a time of increased Asian immigration and parallel rise in legal restrictions, anti-immigration laws, and discourses of scientific racism used to restrict “undesirable” races from entering and becoming citizens in the United States. These cultural producers strategically capitalized on their racial ambivalence, re-packaging and marketing their racial identities in ways that enabled economic success and cultural legitimacy.

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Introduction

In the typical chronology of mixed race, the 1967 Supreme Court decision of *Loving v. Virginia* and the 2000 census stand out as seminal points in United States history. *Loving v. Virginia* dismantled restrictions against interracial marriage and drastically shifted ideas of interracial mixing by increasing the visibility of mixed race peoples and communities, and spurred a growth of community activism and groups that coalesced around a mixed race identity. Those identifying as mixed race jumped from 500,000 in the mid-1960s to over 2 million in the 1990s.¹ This increased visibility and advocacy also led to another landmark decision for multiracial rights: the ability to mark more than one racial category on the 2000 census. Mothers of multiracial children advocated for a separate multiracial identity to be recognized by the government.² Scholar Kimberly DaCosta contends that “telling the story of how multiracials were ‘made’ requires a discussion of the census classification debate of the 1990s during which self-described spokespersons for ‘the multiracial community’ sought to create, quite literally, a new social category.”³ Despite the increasingly vocal argument for it, a separate multiracial category was not created. Instead, multiple racial categories could be marked. These two changes, *Loving v. Virginia* and the 2000 census “mark one or more,” are often seen as the “birth” of multiracials as subjects.

¹ These numbers were based on counting children from married parents of different races. See Naomi Zack, “American Mixed Race: The United States 2000 Census and Related Issues,” in *Mixing it Up: Multiracial Subjects*, ed. SanSan Kwan and Kenneth Speirs (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 23. Mixed race visibility also increased through involvement with, and membership in, community and activist groups.

² Kimberly McClain DaCosta, *Making Multiracials: State, Family, and Market in the Redrawing of the Color Line* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007).

³ *Ibid.*, 12.

While these two cases represent the pursuit of political recognition, the increased visibility of mixed race was also being recognized within United States culture. Another key moment in contemporary mixed race history was the *Time* cover in 1993 that illustrated a computer-generated image of a racially mixed woman with the headline “The New Face of America.” The word “new” suggested that racial mixing was a recent phenomenon. The computer-generated face as the *Time* cover produced an image of the future direction of America’s multicultural society in a celebration of diversity. However, these contemporary examples flatten mixed race representation in the pursuit of using racial mixing to forward political agendas. For instance, liberals used ideas of mixed race to propel the argument that the United States was making progressive steps against racism and that white power was being diminished. For conservatives, racial mixing was evidence that racial tensions no longer existed and served as justification for eliminating race-based policies.⁴ Both sides sought to make mixed race a sign of a post-racist and colorblind America. This was also reflected by the increasing visibility of mixed race marketing and the rise of mixed race models in company advertisements that showcased the culturally visible commodification of mixed race desirability.⁵

This dissertation focuses on Asian American mixed race and intervenes, against the grain of discourses that proclaim the “birth” of multiraciality in the 1990s, to show that being racially mixed was an identity, a career, and an economic survival tactic that was embedded into the United States cultural fabric long before the 1990s. I connect the contemporary scholarship of Asian American racial mixing to a longer historical story or genealogy, thematizing the stories of

⁴ Rainer Spencer, “‘Only the News They Want to Print’: Mainstream Media and Critical Mixed-Race Studies,” *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies* 1.1 (2014), 168.

⁵ DaCosta, *Making Multiracials*. See also Jeffrey Santa Ana, *Racial Feelings: Asian America in a Capitalist Culture of Emotion* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2015).

racial negotiation and mixed race capital by focusing on four Asian American mixed race cultural producers from the late nineteenth to twentieth century—bohemian poet and lecturer Sadakichi Hartmann, writer Winnifred Eaton, actress Merle Oberon, and musician Bardu Ali.

I argue that these cultural producers strategically capitalized on their racial ambiguity, re-packaging and marketing their racial identities in ways that enabled economic success and cultural legitimacy beginning as early as the late nineteenth century. This was a time of increased Asian immigration and parallel rise in legal restrictions, anti-immigration laws, and discourses of scientific racism that were used to restrict “undesirable” races from entering and becoming citizens in the United States. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and subsequent laws excluded Asians from immigration and also legally declared Asians “unfit” for citizenship for almost one hundred years.⁶ Asian and Asian Americans also faced restrictions on interracial relationships and marriage. United States miscegenation laws were enacted unevenly and affected various racial groups differently at specific historical moments and contexts but were created and maintained in the service of white purity, white supremacy, and white privilege.⁷ Miscegenation laws attempted to regulate Asian interracial intimacy, sex, and marriage, predominately between white women and Asian men.⁸ Laws repeatedly mentioned “Chinamen” and the Cable Act

⁶ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004), 18. See other laws such as the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1908 (denying Japanese immigration), the Immigration Act of 1917 (which created a “barred Asiatic zone” from Afghanistan to the Pacific), the Immigration Act of 1924 (which created immigration quotas), and the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 (which classified all Filipinos, even those living in the United States, as foreigners as opposed to the more liminal category of “wards of the state”).

⁷ Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford UP, 2009).

⁸ For a more comprehensive examination of miscegenation laws, including Asian miscegenation laws, see Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally* and Rachel F. Moran, *Interracial Intimacy: The Regulation of Race and Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

(1922) stripped a woman's citizenship if she married someone ineligible for naturalization (e.g., an Asian man).⁹ These laws were reinforced by sensationalized newspaper accounts of hypnotized white women in the clutches of evil Asian men.¹⁰ It is important to note that these laws manufactured, shaped, and normalized a racial structuring within the United States that called for a protection of whiteness.¹¹ In other words, miscegenation laws were deeply racialized and gendered, operating to prop up white male supremacy.¹²

When racial mixing between Asians and whites did occur, scholars and scientists used eugenics to “prove” the mixed race child was innately monstrous, dangerous, and biologically defective.¹³ Starting in the mid-1850s, the discourses about racial mixing were initially confined to biologists and scientists debating scientific racial mixing theories and the pathological tendencies that intermixing in plants, animals, and humans, would produce.¹⁴ Scientists invested in Social Darwinism contributed, both intentionally and inadvertently, to the “racist hysteria of the late 19th and early 20th centuries” by coupling scientific race mixing theories with pathological tendencies such as criminality and lack of intelligence as a means to prevent

⁹ Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, 82.

¹⁰ Ibid, chapter 3. See also Robert L. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1990) and Mary Ting Li, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century New York City* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005).

¹¹ Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, chapter 3. See also Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

¹² Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*. The shift away from biology, although never disappearing completely, was replaced around the 1920s with what Omi and Winant explain as racial projects—where state and state actors interpret, represent, and explain racial dynamics in the service of establishing, distributing, or redistributing resources. See Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

¹³ David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 34.

¹⁴ Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe, ed., *'Mixed Race' Studies: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

interracial relationships and eliminate these “unfit” races.¹⁵ This production of fear was typical of the yellow peril discourse of the early twentieth century.¹⁶ My dissertation focuses on this moment of modern racial formation and its confluence with the beginnings of legal discrimination, scientific racism, and exclusionary immigration practices.

While the late nineteenth century serves as a useful starting point, it is important to note that European colonialism, United States settler colonialism, and imperialism set the conditions for discourses about racial formation and racial mixing.¹⁷ European conquest used race as a means to organize society and as a method of economic and cultural control in the American colonies. It was also the transgression of racial boundaries, through interracial sex, that was motivation for colonial policies regarding racial mixing.¹⁸ It was not that interracial sex posed a danger nor was the sexual fantasy and colonial desire of native women the problem. Instead, it was interracial marriage and the legitimization of mixed-race offspring (as potential heirs with access to property, inheritance, and privilege) that was cause for concern and show how “intimacies of desire, sexuality, marriage, and family are inseparable from the imperial projects of conquest, slavery, labor, and government.”¹⁹ Mixed race as a category thus emerged in an effort to “manage” colonial subjects and then shifted in the United States in an effort to “manage” United States immigrants, and those who were not classified as white. This

¹⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹⁶ Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American*, 35.

¹⁷ See Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 56. They argue that race works as a “fundamental axis of social organization” and that European conquest of the Americas was the first and most prominent racial formation project.

¹⁸ Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*; Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacies: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

¹⁹ Lisa Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke UP, 2015), 17.

dissertation focuses on the emergence of mixed race through an examination of mixed race subjects and their cultural texts. This is in contrast to the methodology of most mixed race scholarship, which until quite recently, had largely been situated in the social sciences and in fields that had the tendency to see multiracials “as symptomatic of largely isolated physiological concerns with personal identity rather than reflective of wider-ranging socio-political questions.”²⁰ Instead, Hartmann, Eaton, Oberon, and Ali’s stories showcase the ways that the legacies of colonialism and global imperial projects continually reappear and remain connected to mixed race. Moreover, being mixed race was a position that was not able to be completely managed or controlled by the ardent policing of racial groups. Hartmann, Eaton, Oberon, and Ali illustrate the various strategies that were used in the attempt to gain legitimization for a mixed race identity during this time period. The positive social identities these individuals attempted to propel are a contrast to the “tragic Eurasian” trope, which was the depiction of Eurasians as inassimilable and a tactic to contain the threat of racial transgression. Within literature, the Eurasian was destined for an unavoidably tragic death.²¹ The trope sought to establish and delineate racial boundaries that were reinforced through laws and emphasized the maintenance of colonial power and white supremacy. But while colonialism and empire were motivation for

²⁰ G. Reginald Daniel, et al. “Emerging Paradigms in Critical Mixed Race Studies,” *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies*, 1.1 (2014), 11.

²¹ Elaine H. Kim, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1982), 9. The tragic Eurasian appeared in Anglo-American literature like Wallace Irwin, *Seed of the Sun* (1921), Sax Rohmer “The Daughter of Huang Chow” (1922) and Achmed Abdullah, “A Simple Act of Piety” (1918), published near the turn of the century. The Eurasian figure becomes tragic in the inability to adjust to either society and must accept her/his marginalized status and die, as most stories end with death. See also Jonathan, Brennan, ed., *Mixed Race Literature* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002). It is typical that the tragic Eurasian figure always desires to be white. See Cynthia L. Nakashima, “Voices from the Movement: Approaches to Multiraciality,” in *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders and the New Frontier*, ed. Maria Root (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996).

depicting Eurasians as tragic, the trope did not fully account for the intimacies that were created through the development of black enslavement, settler colonialism, and Asian immigration.²² As chapter four illustrates, trade routes linked African American and Asian interactions, creating thriving interracial communities and intermixing that were outside the white/nonwhite racial binary and who did not fit into the tragic Eurasian trope.

My attention to these four Asian American mixed race cultural producers diverges from the one-dimensional tragic Eurasian figure and instead showcases a more complex subjectivity and a more active type of cultural brokering—playing on, playing up, and playing against the stereotypes of racial mixing. By seeing a genealogy of mixed race and focusing on the moments when mixed race becomes comprehensible and intelligible through cultural narratives, what emerge are the stories that resist a negative framing of mixed race.²³ These cultural producers helped to control and shape the direction of their fields of cultural production in art and photography (Hartmann), writing (Eaton), cinema (Oberon), and music (Ali). Their ability to gain cultural capital and success, I argue, resulted from leveraging their racialized identities and also resulted, albeit unevenly, in the acquisition of social and economic capital.

I employ the concept of capitalizing, in several interrelated ways: politically, economically, and culturally. Capitalizing politically enabled Hartmann to cultivate a radicalized anarchist identity within New York’s bohemia. It also enabled a Tasmanian community to recuperate the history of Chinese immigrants, through Oberon, effectively adding its voice to the multicultural rhetoric of Australia in the late twentieth century. Capitalizing economically

²² Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*.

²³ Following Michel Foucault, Lowe, in *Intimacies of Four Continents*, explains that genealogical method “questions the apparent closure of our understanding of historical progress” and questions why and how concepts and categories have become perceived as fixed or constant, 3.

enabled Hartmann, Eaton, Oberon, and Ali to make a living producing their art while enjoying varying degrees of financial success. More specifically, it enabled Eaton and Oberon to demand large salaries and, later in their careers, the ability to choose what to write (Eaton) or what roles to take (Oberon). Capitalizing culturally enabled all four individuals to hold long careers in their respective fields. Ali was able to build connections with black entertainment which led him from vaudeville, to jazz, to R&B, and finally to television. Cultural capitalization enabled Hartmann and Eaton to gain access into prestigious literary circles. It also enabled Eaton, Oberon, and Ali the ability to travel internationally in pursuit of their art, a particular luxury for Eaton and Oberon since few women were afforded such experiences during this time.

My focus on the capital that Hartmann, Eaton, Oberon, and Ali acquired links the broader operations of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of capital—or the accrual of tangible social resources and immaterial social value—to their mixed race identity.²⁴ While the acquisition of capital works to consolidate success and wealth, it also reproduces social divisions and reinforces a system based on exclusion and racial inequality. For instance, scholars have shown how claiming whiteness is a possession that “enhances one's life changes as configured through the logic of capital.”²⁵ Whiteness enables social advantages and has “cash value,” in that it functions as an asset and form of property.²⁶ Hartmann, Eaton, and Oberon attempted to access the privileges of whiteness as one form of capital. Hartmann's classification as white on his marriage

²⁴ Mark Chiang, “Cultural Capital,” in *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Island Literature*, ed. Rachel C. Lee (New York: Routledge, 2014). See also Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

²⁵ Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), xx.

²⁶ George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment of Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1998), vii. See also Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Law Review* 106.8 (1993), 1701-1791.

license made it practically undeniable to dispute his marriage to his white wife. Oberon's white identity ensured that she could play lead romantic roles onscreen and which meant financial security. By living in Hollywood, Oberon also became part of a group of "white women [who] experienced less social stratification and greater legislative protections than in most cities."²⁷ These instances serve as examples that afforded these cultural producers access to benefits that were only accessible to whites. My focus on the capital of mixed race, however, shows that whiteness was not the only way to gain capital from race and racial identity during this time period. Bardu Ali stands in this study as an Asian American mixed race subject who also identified as black. Ali diverges from the other three cultural producers in this dissertation because the capital he acquired did not come from whiteness. Instead it was the value of being perceived as black within these black cultural circuits that was important. In this way, black racial affiliation and inclusion enabled him to secure a foothold in these fields.

Being mixed race also produced capital as it intertwined with gender, sexuality, and class. As women, Eaton and Oberon faced disadvantages that were not evident in the lives of Hartmann and Ali. Oberon was often forced to publicly address her intimate relationships and connections to prominent men like studio executive Joseph Schenck, actor David Niven, and director/producer Alexander Korda in ways that Hollywood male actors did not typically need to do. Eaton's short-lived time as a Hollywood writer includes experiences of the multiple sexual advances and sexual harassment that she and other women faced by male colleagues and supervisors. Oberon and Eaton's success also depended on a type of heterosexual respectability that was not a central focus for Hartmann and Ali. For instance, Eaton and Oberon increased

²⁷ Hilary Hallett, *Go West, Young Women!: The Rise of Early Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 23.

their class status through their marriages (Eaton's marriage to cattle businessman Francis Reeve and Oberon's marriage to industrialist Bruno Pagliai). This dissertation shows that despite the obstacles these women faced, they were able to leverage their careers by focusing their attention and their cultural work on the large and growing consumer population of women.

In contrast, Hartmann's self-proclaimed humble beginnings upon his arrival in the United States and the meager income generated from his cultural work aligned him with the values of bohemia and included him within the community. Likewise, Ali's associations with the black cultural community and famous cultural artists like jazz musicians Chick Webb and Ella Fitzgerald and comedian Red Foxx created opportunities that increased his visibility, his career, and his income. Undoubtedly, as mixed race men, Hartmann and Ali did not face the same types of career limitations that Eaton and Oberon experienced at mixed race women.

The privileges and benefits that these Asian American mixed race cultural producers gained were highly dependent on their fields, or the context in which interactions or exchanges of capital occur. Bourdieu explains that each field is equipped with unique set of rules, practices, and knowledge.²⁸ For instance, the context of Hollywood (Oberon) functioned very differently from the context of professional writers (Eaton). Hartmann and Ali navigated multiple fields. Ali, although he crossed within multiple artistic genres, remained firmly rooted in the field of black cultural circuits. For Hartmann, photography had emerged as a field that was dominated by mostly white men.²⁹ While Hartmann was able to gain capital through the performance of his white Sidney Allan persona in the photography circuit, within the arena of bohemia, his mixed race identity aligned with a cosmopolitan sensibility that served to reflect the values and interests

²⁸ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*.

²⁹ Wexler, *Tender Violence*.

of those in that community. In other words, his tactics and strategies for gaining capital shifted according to these contexts.

While this dissertation argues that racial ambiguity and mixed race produces capital, racial ambiguity is also precarious. Precarity evokes instability and fear, particularly as it is connected to capitalism and names the exploitation of work and workers. Alyson Cole explains that precarity can be described by its sense of movement as it “denotes the perpetual motion entailed in unsettledness.”³⁰ She links precarity to Gloria Anzaldúa’s work on borderlands to argue that ambivalence generates precarity. Similarly, the very embodiment of multiple races, ethnicities, and cultures marked the cultural producers in this dissertation as occupying tenuous positions. Indeed, anyone not white in the United States can be identified as working from a place of precarity. The racial ambiguity of not belonging in one racial space came with costs and limitations. As chapter one shows, Hartmann was feminized; his wild hair linked to his Japanese ancestry and functioned as a mechanism of disempowerment. His deliberate claiming of a Korean identity during World War II illustrates that Hartmann feared that his freedom would be revoked and he would be interned, like other Japanese and Japanese Americans. And as the correspondence between Eaton and author, Peter B. Kyne demonstrates, Eaton was faced with backlash and contempt by her colleagues for articulating a Eurasian identity. While chapter four showcases the career advantages of Ali being perceived as a black artist, being black also meant fear of lynching, Jim Crow laws that prevented racial integration, the disenfranchisement of black voters, and a legacy of slavery and continued violence and terror. Ali encountered racism and discrimination throughout his professional career because he was perceived as a black

³⁰ Alyson Cole, “Precarious Politics: Anzaldúa’s Reparative Reworking,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, 45.3& 45.4 Fall/Winter (2017), 78.

performer. While this dissertation highlights the strategies of racial ambiguity, it should be noted that does not diminish the fear, precarity, or lived racial hardships that these Asian American mixed race cultural producers faced as they attempted to cross racial lines and make it in their careers.

The strategy of claiming a racialized identity is also linked to the precariousness that racialized groups were subject to, which flared up in various historical moments or according to specific regional racial formations. While these cultural producers carved their careers by claiming a mixed race identity as capital, that identification was always haunted by the threat of racial violence and exclusion. Japanese internment was one moment where being Japanese or mixed race Japanese resulted in the elimination of freedoms, the loss of property, and the separation of families. Being African American or mixed race African American in the South during the Jim Crow era was always accompanied by exclusion and punishment, particularly if whites suspected blacks of stepping outside racial bounds. While a mixed race identity was a successful strategy at times, its stability or volatility rested on the socio-political atmosphere in the United States and was always subject to the illogics of white supremacy.

Despite this environment of precarity, their acts and strategies showcase a keen sense of understanding of the socio-political conditions of the time and demonstrate an early ability to create a racialized identity that was predicated upon a type a racial flexibility. Jennifer Ann Ho's *Racial Ambiguity* argues for a conceptualization of Asian American mixed race through a lens of racial ambiguity, highlighting race as protean and unstable and interpreted differently by different people in different moments. She explains, "to recognize race is to recognize ambiguity—a terrain that most of us are not comfortable with, because to acknowledge ambiguity is to acknowledge a complexity that does not allow for easy answers or predictable

outcomes.”³¹ The identities of the Asian American mixed race cultural producers examined in this dissertation were flexible and ambiguous. They did not always hinge on Asianness, but also on whiteness (Oberon and Hartmann) and blackness (Ali). Their racial identities shifted throughout their lifetime, with Hartmann, for instance, claiming to be white, then Japanese/German, and even Korean/German.

Capitalizing on their mixed race identity was undoubtedly made possible by the shifting cultural landscape of the United States at the turn of the century. It was a time of rapid United States industrialization which enabled mass production and consumption of newspapers, novels, and other cultural forms. The rise of mass-produced and distributed goods, technological advancements of motion picture projectors, musical recordings, and broadcasting enabled entertainment to be enjoyed by a wider demographic.³² At a time when immigration restrictions and racial groups were perceived as Other and unwelcome into the United States, the consumption of Asian goods and items was on the rise. Capitalizing on an Asian American mixed race identity could not have been possible without the commodification of Oriental goods, which was a direct result of empire building. Scholars like Kristin Hoganson and Mari Yoshihara have complicated Edward Said’s work on Orientalism to show the consumption of Asian goods and items reinforced a type of white identity at the turn of the twentieth century. In turn, as “consumers, producers, practitioners, critics, and experts,” white middle and upper-class women actively shaped American Orientalism, which functioned as a mode of empowerment.³³ This

³¹ Jennifer Ann Ho, *Racial Ambiguity in Asian American Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2015), 11.

³² Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1998), 39.

³³ Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (New York: Oxford UP, 2003), 6.

dissertation builds on this scholarship to show not only the ways that these cultural *products* were racialized but also the ways that the cultural *producers* were racialized and commodified alongside their products.

The chapters that follow show how Asian American multiracial cultural producers have been depicted through Orientalist discourse but have also used it advantageously to promote their own careers. Their mixed race identity was based upon the audiences' desires to consume the Orient. Eaton's identity and fiction writing on Japan, for instance, made her extremely popular and enabled her to promote a positive Eurasian identity. Hartmann, like Eaton, also situated himself as an expert in Japan within the United States lecture circuit. Ali was exoticized and garnered newspaper attention in the early part of his career. And while Oberon's self-declared public identity was white, she promoted a desirability for being and looking Eurasian. Taken collectively, I analyze them as active agents on the racial margins, and showcase the creative strategies they deployed as they attempted to stake a claim in American cultural life. While somewhat empowered by strategic racial identification, they were also constrained in their careers in many ways, most noticeably in how their career success became inextricably tied to essentialized notions of race. For Hartmann, Oberon, and Eaton, their careers became predicated upon a type of self-Orientalism which they were never quite able to leave behind.

These four cultural producers' participation in United States culture tapered off at various points, with Bardu Ali working as Redd Foxx's manager in *Sanford and Son*, one of the first black television shows, as late as the 1970s. While the 1970s does not serve as a neat and tidy close to these performers' careers or lives, it reflects the shifting of national sentiment toward immigrants (with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that removed a race-based immigration admission policy), the rise of civil rights, and an eventual insurgency of movements

that sought to instill racial and cultural pride alongside inclusion in the body politic. These factors paved the way for the multiracial movement of the 1980s and 1990s: the traditional starting point for examining multiraciality. In this way, this study pushes the traditional narrative of the emergence of Asian American mixed race to an earlier period to show the ways in which multiracial identity construction was enacted in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century.

Hartmann, Eaton, Oberon, and Ali serve as useful case studies because they span various cultural fields and they represent varying degrees of fame. Eaton and Oberon had mainstream recognition while Hartmann and Ali were mostly established within their respective career fields and communities. Hartmann, Eaton, and Oberon also show the particularized ways that whiteness enhanced their careers. Most notably, Oberon and Hartmann's ability to pass as white was tied to their Eurasian identity. By contrast, Ali shows the limitations in positing a universal Asian American mixed race experience because although Ali was exoticized in his early career, throughout the majority of his career he was read as black. Hartmann, Eaton, Oberon, and Ali did not explicitly establish identities that were specified using the term "multiracial" but they embodied racial identities that went beyond monoraciality and refused traditional racial categorizations. An analysis of the lives of these four individuals does more than simply address the lacunae in historical scholarship on the racialization of Asian American mixed race cultural producers; it works to resist the fictive "birth" narrative of mixed race scholarship. It also shows the nuanced ways that this racialization was manufactured, resituated, and reconstituted by government laws/policy, the racial communities, and the mixed race individuals themselves. There are also limitations to this dissertation, including the fact that these four individuals were chosen because they had cultural works written in English that were available to analyze, and they performed or produced in English-dominant contexts. In this way, this dissertation is limited

in scope in that it does not develop potential archival materials in other languages or represent the experiences of non-English speaking mixed race cultural producers.

Using Hartmann, Oberon, Eaton, and Ali as key examples of Asian American mixed race cultural producers, this dissertation asks the following questions: In what ways did their careers hinge on the commodification of mixed race identities? How was a mixed race identity incorporated into their cultural texts and how were these cultural texts marketed, read, and consumed by the public? In what ways did their strategic self-exoticization both reinforce and unsettle traditional notions of race and racial mixing? How are their legacies recorded in public memory, and how does that inform the way they were racialized historically and today? And most importantly, how and why did these cultural producers capitalize on their racial ambivalence and mixed race identity?

Mixed Race Identity and the Politics of Naming

One difficulty of extending a genealogy of Asian American mixed race is the use of terms. Racial mixing has generated a diverse list of historically, geographically, and culturally specific terms that attempt to classify people of mixed race descent. The concept *mestizaje* highlights the racial and cultural multiplicity and fluidity in Latin America produced during and after Spanish colonialism.³⁴ *Mestizaje* is both a celebration and idealization of cultural fluidity and mixing and an acknowledgement of its historical and violent roots. The term “embodies a historical narrative of the production of mixture, the often coercive intermingling of bloods—on the national level as well as the individual level—through the rape of indigenous and African

³⁴ Suzanne Bost, *Mulattas and Mestizas: Representing Mixed Identities in the Americas, 1850-2000* (Athens: University of Georgia, 2005), 8.

women by men of European descent.”³⁵ Similarly, terms like half-caste, which in the case of Native Americans in the United States (and Aboriginal people in Australia and Tasmania as chapter three shows) attempted to cultivate white supremacy and settler colonialism through intermixing and the elimination of the Indigenous Other by the logic of racial quantum. This was very much in contrast to African American racial mixing, with terms like mulatto, quadroon, and octoroon that exemplified the perception that any African American mixture was to be recorded and indicated all types of multiracial classifications as black (and thus as property).³⁶

For Asian American racial mixing, both contemporary and historical terms exist as well. Recently, the terms hafu and hapa have been used widely by the Asian American community. Hafu is used in Japanese culture and, according to the Hafu Project, is meant to describe “somebody who is Half Japanese” and one that “projects an ideal type; English ability, international cultural experience, western physical features – tall with long legs, small head/face, yet often looking Japanese enough for the majority to feel comfortable with.”³⁷ Its western counterpart, the Hapa Project, features a similar aim of visibility, demystifying stereotypes, and forming a collective mixed race Asian identity. Its website states:

The hapa project was created to promote awareness and recognition of the millions of multiracial/multiethnic individuals of asian/pacific islander descent; to give voice to multiracial people and previously ignored ethnic groups; to dispel myths of exoticism, hybrid vigor and racial homogeneity; to foster positive identity formation and self-image

³⁵ Ibid., 9.

³⁶ Teresa C. Zackodnik, *The Mulatta and the Politics of Race* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004).

³⁷ Natalie Maya Willer and Marcia Yumi Lise, *Hafu: Half Japanese*, <http://www.hafujapanese.org/eng/project.html>, accessed Dec. 27, 2017. See also “The Hapa Database Project,” <https://hapajapan.com>, accessed on December 27, 2017, which is an online database and site that focuses on mixed race Japanese.

in multiracial children; and to encourage solidarity and empowerment within the multiracial/hapa community.³⁸

Noticeably, a definition of the term is not listed on the website for the project. Hapa is perhaps the closest term associated with Asian American racial mixing. An offshoot from the Hawaiian word hapalua, hapa is a Hawaiian pidgin word that is typically used to describe someone that is of Asian mixed race descent.³⁹ Hapa showcases problems of appropriation of the Hawaiian language, which was used to convey Hawaiian/whites within the context of a settler colonial society in Hawai'i. In "Hapa: The Word of Power," Wei Ming Dariotis reflexively examines her own scholarship to conclude that "I will not use 'Hapa' anymore in my academic writing as a shorthand for Asian Americans of mixed heritage."⁴⁰ However, she then asks, "what to replace it with?"⁴¹ The problem has been, and continues to be, what word correctly embodies the identity of those who are mixed race Asian Americans?

Instead of using terms like hafu and hapa, this dissertation, when appropriate, uses the terms that reflect the time period. For instance, when describing Sadakichi Hartmann who both was (and proclaimed to be) Japanese and German, I use the term Eurasian. The term had initially reflected the offspring of British men and Indian women during British colonialism but quickly gained popularity through United States literature at the turn of the century to reflect those who

³⁸ Kip Fulbeck, *The Hapa Project*. <http://kipfulbeck.com/the-hapa-project>, accessed Dec. 27, 2017.

³⁹ Alex Laughlin, "'Half Asian'? 'Half White'? No – 'Hapa,'" *National Public Radio Code Switch: Race and Identity, Remixed*, Dec. 15, 2014, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/12/15/370416571/half-asian-half-white-no-hapa>, accessed Dec. 27, 2017.

⁴⁰ Wei Ming Dariotis, "Hapa: The Word of Power." Mixed Heritage Center, http://www.mixedheritagecenter.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1259&Itemid=34, accessed Dec. 27, 2017.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

were Asian and white.⁴² I also use the terms mixed race, mixed heritage, of mixed race descent, and multiracial interchangeably, which follows the flexibility of other scholars in the field of mixed race studies. These terms are used as both adjectives and nouns and despite the absence of quotations, I follow Michelle Elam who notes that her “aim is to question precisely the normative assumptions associated with the expression itself, so the quotation marks are always implied.”⁴³ My use of multiraciality and multiracialism is also in tandem with scholars in which multiraciality and multiracialism signifies the “political initiatives of the multiracial movement, the academic field of multiracial studies, and the media discourse about ‘race mixture.’”⁴⁴ Taken collectively, these terms signal an academic field, a key focus and object of study, and a racial identity.

Some scholars tend to privilege usage of certain terms over others. For instance, for some, multiracial is preferred because it creates a distance from a mixed race colonial history and moves away from having an identity connected to being “mixed up” or “confused.” Others, however, see multiracial as too closely aligned with (and mistaken for) the generic ideal of “multiculturalism” and “diversity.”⁴⁵ All of these umbrella terms also have the tendency to homogenize and conflate the unique socio-historical experiences of intermixing among various ethnic groups. While using the terms in a flexible manner is a useful reminder of the flexibility of racial identity, scholars in the field are quick to note that these terms should not be assumed to

⁴² Shirley Geok-lin Lim, “Introduction,” Diana Chang *The Frontiers of Love* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), xi.

⁴³ Michele Elam, *The Souls of Mixed Folk: Race, Politics, and Aesthetics in the New Millennium* (Stanford: Stanford UP: 2011), 205.

⁴⁴ Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2008), 1.

⁴⁵ G. Reginald Daniel, “Editor’s Note,” *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies*, 1.1 (2014), 5.

represent transcultural, transracial, integrationist, and egalitarian perspectives.⁴⁶ Finally, I recognize that these terms are contemporary representations of identity politics that started in the 1980s. Anachronistic to a later time period and cognizant of the problems of these terms, I still use them in this dissertation to gesture to the collective experiences and generalizations that move beyond the specific lives of Hartmann, Eaton, Oberon, and Ali.

Mixing the Fields of Scholarship

This dissertation reflects the interdisciplinary sensibilities of American studies, intertwining fields of Asian American studies and critical mixed race studies in the examination of the racialization of American culture. Asian American studies has established a self-critical gaze, ensuring that identity politics, while taken into account, is not hailed as *the* solution to the problems of race in the United States. Kandice Chuh argues for Asian American studies to turn to a subjectless discourse, one that moves beyond a type of cultural nationalism in the field and beyond simple identity politics or subjectivity.⁴⁷ Instead, she posits that we should critique the identity politics that has created the racial essentialism of these fields and staked claims, fences, and territories around what is, and what can be, Asian America. The mixed race cultural producers examined reinforce racial essentialism by foregrounding a type of race identity but also put into question the very boundaries and borders of racial identities. However, with the exception of Jennifer Ann Ho, no full-length studies have explored the complexity of a mixed race Asian America. In her examination of Asian American mixed race, Ho calls forth a focus on racial ambiguity as a “productive analytic (a way of scrutinizing objects), hermeneutics (a way of

⁴⁶ G. Reginald Daniel, et al. “Emerging Paradigms in Critical Mixed Race Studies,” 22.

⁴⁷ Candice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003).

interpreting objects), and epistemology (a way of knowing objects)” because racial ambiguity is able to account for the morphing mechanism of race and the ways in which the power of race changes dependent on time and location.⁴⁸ This dissertation, like Ho’s work, addresses the place of mixed race Asian Americans within the United States racial landscape and the tensions that arise when they are read as ambiguous and ambivalent Asian Americans.⁴⁹ While seeing the value in Chuh’s argument, this dissertation, however, does not attempt to create a subjectless discourse but instead highlights how reading Asian American multiracials into the story of Asian America punctures a singular or essentialist Asian/American subjectivity by forcing attention to the blurred edges of race and racial ambiguity.

Asian American studies has also informed this dissertation by establishing the ambivalent place of Asian Americans in the United States racial landscapes, in ways that mirror how Asian American mixed race individuals were historically viewed and shows how the United States excluded Asian bodies while embracing Asian objects. While works like David Liu-Palumbo’s *Asian/American* and Lisa Lowe’s *Immigrant Acts* have examined hybridity as a site of alternative racial reimaginings, Cynthia L. Nakashima’s scholarship directly called attention to Asian American mixed race identity within Asian American studies by arguing that it was not only a worthy topic within the field but it was not sufficient to superficially address mixed race within Asian American studies. Instead, she pushes an intellectual challenge to consciously incorporate

⁴⁸ Ho, *Racial Ambiguity*, 5.

⁴⁹ For scholarship that does address specifically Asian American mixed race see Vivek Bald, *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 2013); Karen Isaksen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California’s Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1992); Emma Jinhua Teng, *Eurasian: Mixed Identities in the United States, China, and Hong Kong, 1842-1943* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013). See also Shah, *Stranger Intimacy* and Ho, *Racial Ambiguity*.

mixed race studies into the field of Asian American studies with the call to “come and see what the mixed race discourse has to offer you in your pursuit of knowledge.”⁵⁰

This work also builds from scholars invested in the inquiry of racial mixing, critically pushing the field of critical mixed race studies to see the ways in which mixed race and racial ambiguity have operated.⁵¹ While the field’s tendency has been to either embrace or dismiss people of mixed race or multiracials, Michele Elam’s *The Souls of Mixed Folk* and other scholars have started looking beyond the binary and seeing multiracials as one existing component within the United States racial landscape. For instance, Elam has asked that we look “between the competing hagiographic and apocalyptic impulses in mixed race scholarship, between those who espouse mixed race as the great hallelujah to the ‘race problem’ and those who can only hear the alarmist bells of civil rights destruction.”⁵² Following Elam, the aim of this dissertation is to push Asian American mixed race scholarship to look back—to better understand how mixed race individuals were represented in earlier periods. By doing so, this dissertation links the contemporary tensions between embrace and disavowal of Asian American mixed race to its historical antecedents.

⁵⁰ Cynthia L. Nakashima, “Asian American Studies Through (Somewhat) Asian Eyes: Integrating ‘Mixed race’ into the Asian American Discourse,” in *Asian American Studies After Critical Mass*, ed. Kent A. Ono (Malden: Blackwell, 2005).

⁵¹ The field of mixed race studies emerged in the 1980s as a response to the multiracial movement. Multiracial activists and groups (like Association of MultiEthnic Americans (AMEA) and Project RACE) saw multiracials as marginalized in their inability to belong in minority or mainstream groups and as a solution, sought out the establishment of a singular multiracial identity. On the one hand, hallmark achievements in the movement included the ability to mark one or more box on the 2000 census. On the other hand, the movement was quickly co-opted into a neoliberal agenda, the use of colorblind rhetoric, and the rise of neo-conservatism in the attempt to dismantle affirmative action programs. Early groundbreaking books on mixed race include Paul Spickard, *Mixed Blood: Intermarriage and Ethnic Identity in Twentieth-Century America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989) and Maria P.P. Root, *Racially Mixed People in America* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1992).

⁵² Elam, *The Souls of Mixed Folk*, xv.

Scholars like Rudy Guevarra, Karen Isaksen Leonard, and Vivek Bald have further enhanced this scholarship on mixed race communities within United States racial history by analyzing Filipino and Mexican communities, Indian and Mexican communities, and Bengali and African American communities respectively.⁵³ In particular, Bald's *Bengali Harlem* directly informs my analysis of the rich community between Bengali men and African American and creole women in the South, including cultural performer Bardu Ali. In the epilogue to *Imagining Japanese America*, Elena Tajima Creef focuses on contemporary mixed race cultural performers and the politics of representation to argue that there is a need to show how "their performances remind us of the dramatic lack of national imagination to envision not just a non-white, but a complex multiethnic and multicultural reconfiguration of America."⁵⁴ She poignantly showcases mixed race performers feelings' of national alienation and racial un-belonging, ideas that are intertwined and illuminated in the chapters that follow.

These feelings of national alienation did not grow out of nowhere, and Asian American scholarship has shown how Asian communities in the United States were subject to, and shaped by, legal and cultural restrictions. Gina Marchetti's *Romance and the 'Yellow Peril'* is informative in showing how interracial sexuality was depicted in Hollywood, which reinforced and subverted "culturally accepted notions of nation, class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation."⁵⁵ Hollywood's obsession with miscegenation and its broad cultural appeal juxtaposed against Hollywood's racial rules informed my ideas of Merle Oberon (chapter three)

⁵³ Guevarra Jr., *Becoming Mexipino*; Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*; Bald, *Bengali Harlem*.

⁵⁴ Elena Creef, *Imagining Japanese America: The Visual Construction of Citizenship, Nation, and the Body* (New York: New York UP, 2004), 174.

⁵⁵ Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril": Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 1.

and enhanced my understanding of why it would be desirable to be perceived as mixed race during this time period.

This dissertation also engages with whiteness studies including seminal works like David Roediger, Toni Morrison, George Lipsitz, and Matthew Frye Jacobson.⁵⁶ These scholars have persuasively shown the racialized (and classed and gendered) mechanism of power and the ways in which whites have been shaped by and because of their race. They also assert a liminality of these groups at different historical moments, carefully noting the adversity that whites faced (oftentimes before they were considered white) is nowhere comparable to the hardships encountered by people of color. The same rings true for people of Asian mixed race descent with white ancestry. The privileges that Hartmann, Eaton, and Oberon embodied were profoundly different from Ali. In chapters one, two, and three I pay close attention to how white privilege informed the lives of these cultural producers. In contrast, in chapter four, I use AfroAsian scholarship to anchor my discussion of Ali's mixed race identity. However, I do not compare the privileges of Hartmann, Eaton, and Oberon to those of Ali, which would have the effect of replicating the same type of hierarchies of discrimination. In other words, I use the specific ancestry of each case study not to rank their privilege (or disadvantages) but rather to show the various ways in which identity can be used in the service of the creation of opportunity. Whereas individuals like Oberon used her perceived whiteness to propel her career success in an almost

⁵⁶ David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey From Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic, 2005); Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998).

exclusively white film industry, Ali capitalized on his perceived blackness to propel his career in black entertainment.

I use historical, literary, textual, and cultural analysis in the following chapters, each chapter representing one case study, as a way to understand how these individuals deployed their racial identities within their careers and how others read their race in ways that were congruent or in contrast with each other. I use primary documents in the form of published and unpublished writings, biographies and autobiographies, newspaper articles, personal correspondence, government documents like marriage certificates and police reports, and video recordings as a way to show Hartmann, Eaton, Oberon, and Ali as active agents in their cultural productions, in their cultural fields, and in the constructions of their racial identities. Both their lives and their cultural work represent texts that shed light on their negotiated racialized identities.

I undertook archival research trips and used primary materials in order to centralize the four cultural producers' voices, agency, and power.⁵⁷ Hartmann, Eaton, and Oberon had dedicated institutional archives. Some of the archival materials were dense, rich, and extensive—like that of Hartmann and Eaton. I examined over 50 boxes of Hartmann materials and over 39 boxes of Eaton materials that included meticulous collecting and cataloguing of articles, publications, including scraps of their written down thoughts and ideas. This was in contrast to Ali, who lacked a dedicated institutional archive, a condition that was exacerbated by the fact that his voice was difficult to find even within the materials that reported on his career. When he

⁵⁷ These trips included the Rivera Library Special Collections Department at the University of California, Riverside, CA; University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Alberta Canada; Margaret Herrick Library at the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, CA. I also gathered archival materials from the British Library and the Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, & Rare Book Library at Emory University, Atlanta, GA.

was quoted, it was largely as a secondary cultural figure, describing and validating others' cultural work.

These archival collections helped to legitimize these cultural producers and their careers and also reveal the logic of the archives. For Hartmann, Eaton, and Oberon, libraries have recognized and celebrated their lives and cultural work by claiming them through the very possession of their archives. The University of Calgary's School of Creative and Performing Arts' Reeve Theater is even named after Eaton (Reeve was her married last name).⁵⁸ This naming serves as a method of recognition of their work, their contributions to the community, and as a way to continue their legacy. Their materials were not categorized by their mixed race identity, but rather through a timeline of their career. Ann Laura Stoler explains that colonial management and colonial archives are typically organized by person, not by theme so "an interest in European paupers or abandoned mixed blood children gets you nowhere, unless you know how they mattered to whom, when, and why they did so."⁵⁹ Similarly, along the logic of the archives, these institutions categorized materials in the ways that showed why these people mattered—their cultural work. As Antoinette Burton argues, an archive is not objective or an "arbiter of truth."⁶⁰ Instead, archives are dynamic, subjective, and offer fragmented portions of evidence. While their cultural work took center stage within the archives, this dissertation goes

⁵⁸ Jennifer Sowa, "Canada 150 exhibit highlights notable Canadians and milestones in our history," University of Calgary, June 30, 2017, <https://www.ucalgary.ca/utoday/issue/2017-06-30/canada-150-exhibit-highlights-notable-canadians-and-milestones-canadian-history>, accessed Dec. 27, 2017.

⁵⁹ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2009), 10.

⁶⁰ Antoinette Burton, "Introduction: Archive Fever, Archive Stories," in *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and The Writing of History*, ed. Antoinette Burton (Durham: Duke UP, 2005), 9.

deeper to analyze the particularized archival materials that demonstrate how and why a marking (or unmarking) of a mixed race identity mattered.

Chapter Outline

The four case studies show the varying degrees that these culturally producers capitalized on their mixed race at the same time that it was limiting and debilitating in their lives and/or careers. Chapter one analyzes Sadakichi Hartmann to argue that his racial ambiguity enabled him to cultivate playful, humorous, and constantly shifting identities throughout his life. His articulation of the white upper-class identity of Sidney Allan provided him a type of respectability in the photography world and primed his Eurasian identity, which was then marketed and highlighted within the art lecture circuit and specifically within the context of New York's bohemia during the early twentieth century. I show the ways that his Eurasian cosmopolitanism both enhanced his career but also limited his attempts to be read otherwise, particularly when he sought to claim a bohemian anarchist identity. The fluidity and malleability of being mixed race is most pronounced in chapter one, as Hartmann clearly used his racial ambiguity in any way that could be advantageous to his career and generating income.

Chapter two highlights Winnifred Eaton, who took the pen name Onoto Watanna, and positions her as a domestic advisor to argue that her work in women's magazines advantageously used white women's growing interest in science to reframe the discourses of eugenics, as a means to advocate for racial mixing and a positive Eurasian identity. In doing so, Eaton asserted an authority for topics related to the home, in a post-romance context (which contrasted from her earlier and more popular romance fictions). However, Eaton also received backlash for her assertive pronouncements toward a positive refiguring of Eurasians and her personal correspondences show an uncertainty in being so publicly outspoken.

Merle Oberon, in contrast to Hartmann and Eaton, did not claim a Eurasian identity. Chapter three shows how she branded herself as a white film actress at the same time she entertained and played with the rumors of being Eurasian as a method to increase desirability and popularity. Her marketability, like Eaton's, heavily relied on women consumers, and Oberon specifically catered to the New Woman identity. While passing for white enabled her to circumvent racial restrictions in the Hollywood film industry, the rumors of being Eurasian empowered her and made her more marketable within the beauty and fashion industries that were connected to Hollywood stars. These same rumors that empowered her and which resulted in confusion of her birthplace also enabled communities to claim her, which resulted in the increased visibility of Chinese immigrants in Tasmania and which also corresponded to the multicultural political rhetoric of Australia in the late twentieth century.

Chapter four highlights the cultural work of Bardu Ali in the context of silence about his mixed race identity. His passivity is read as a strategic deployment of his identity, which enabled his racial identity to be read in the service of his cultural career, particularly by newspapers. In the earlier part of his career, newspapers depicted Ali as mixed race and exotic. By the time he entered into the television industry in the 1970s, he was perceived and depicted as black. Ali's fluid racial identity is complemented by a masculinity that was constructed vis-à-vis women in his life, often in ways that silenced black women's voices and diminished their agency. Taken together, these chapters all draw attention to the converging and diverging strategies that these cultural producers advantageously utilized their racialized identities.

Chapter 1

“Sadakichi Hartmann—Genius? or Charlatan?”: Performing Race in New York’s Bohemia

As the self-proclaimed “King of Bohemia,” Carl Sadakichi Hartmann was an eccentric figure whose popularity was accentuated by his Japanese-German ancestry during his reign within New York’s bohemia. An examination of the life and cultural work of Hartmann shows the complex and contradictory ways that Hartmann engineered his cultural identities as a lecturer and anarchist in bohemia. Hartmann, who had a paternal lineage from Germany and a maternal lineage tracing to Japan, saw his Eurasian identity as a means to traverse traditionally ascribed racial borders and gain a foothold as a cultural producer during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Tracing the mutually beneficial relationship between Hartmann and the bohemian community illustrates how bohemia shaped the conditions of possibility that enabled Hartmann to craft a radicalized political and artistic identity in the United States and conversely, allowed bohemia to stake its claim as a racially diverse and cosmopolitan community of eccentric characters.

New York’s bohemia was an identifiable spatial location, occupying four blocks known as Greenwich Village. It was also a community of people who pushed against Victorian morals and values, were politically leftist, and gravitated toward artistic and literary cultural expressions.¹ Young Hartmann moved to Washington Square in 1889, attracted by the low rent,

¹ Hippolyte Havel, “The Spirit of the Village,” *Bruno’s Weekly*, 5.1 (Aug. 14, 1915). For more information about bohemia see Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000); Elizabeth Wilson, *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2000); Joanna Levin, *Bohemia in America: 1859-1920* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2010); Gerald W. McFarland, *Inside Greenwich Village: A New York City Neighborhood, 1898-1918* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Roy Kotynek and John Cohassey, *American Cultural Rebels: Avant-*

the comingling of literary writers and artists, and the liberal political ideologies of the Village. As a Eurasian, Hartmann was unique amongst the predominately Anglo-American, Jewish, French, German, and Russian immigrant bohemians. He captured American audiences and held a long career on the east coast with his wild antics, long black hair, dancing, proclaimed but quite disputed knowledge of Japanese culture, and sharp criticism of literature, art, and photography. For bohemia, Hartmann's inclusion offered the opportunity to construct and promote an idealized figure of racial integration, a worldly utopian image, and vision of pluralism. For Hartmann, bohemia offered an opportunity to cultivate his voice as a producer of knowledge and the flexibility to challenge social and political norms. His successes were shaped by his participation in bohemia and his identity as bohemian.

Tracking Hartmann's overlapping professions as a photography critic and lecturer prior to, and during, his establishment in bohemia illustrates the performativity of Hartmann's many concurrent identities and how Hartmann came to intentionally construct and highlight a specifically Eurasian identity—one that was eclectically bizarre and complementary to bohemia. Although the term Eurasian first gained currency in the early nineteenth century and was used as a reference to Anglo-Indians in British colonial India, it quickly gained popularity within the United States.² Eurasians were often seen as a threat to the maintenance of white purity and evidence of the “decline of civilization, or social unrest,” which were wielded in the service of white supremacy.³ Within the United States and starting in the mid-1800s, the influx of immigrants led to increasing nativism, a popularized eugenics movement, and vehement

Garde and Bohemian Artists, Writers, and Musicians from the 1850s through the 1960s (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008); Ross Wetzsteon, *Republic of Dreams: Greenwich Village: The American Bohemia, 1910-1960* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002).

² Teng, *Eurasian*, 6.

³ *Ibid.*, 5.

exclusion of nonwhite and foreign bodies. Asian exclusionary measures and laws against miscegenation resulted from and exacerbated the fear of the “yellow peril.” While United States laws differentiated between various ethnic groups, and excluded others from the country, in newspapers the homogenizing effect of the “Oriental” rendered all Eurasians as having indistinguishable Asian ancestry.

Eurasians were often depicted in the media alongside reports of rising interracial sex and interracial marriage between whites and Asians. Most famously, the 1890 *Harper's Weekly* article and political cartoon featured a family in Chinatown, consisting of a white working-class woman holding a child next to her Chinese husband while their two young mixed race children played nearby. The prominence of the interracial family in the image reflected the prevailing attitudes toward and astonishment about Chinese Irish intermarriage. In reference to the children in the image, the article asserted, “what kind of people the hybrids will prove to be is yet an unsolved problem,” using language of a “problem” to refer to race.⁴ For others, Eurasians were more than just an unsolved problem but also “the spiritual death of the nation” and harbingers of “racial pollution, moral contamination, vice unbalanced by virtue.”⁵ Eurasians, at best, were a source of inquiry and bewilderment, and at worst were outcast, ostracized, and villainized in popular literature.⁶ Attitudes against intermarriage were reflected outside of newspaper accounts,

⁴ Qtd. in Teng, *Eurasian*, 89. See also Lee, *Orientalism*, 73.

⁵ Colleen Lye, *America's Asia: Racial Formation and American Literature, 1893-1945* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005), 66. See also Teng, *Eurasian*, 98.

⁶ Teng asserts that Eurasians were forced to negotiate an identity that was contradictory and was exclusionary at times as well as the embodiment of cultural pluralism at other times, 5. For more examples of the negative stigmatizing features that occurred between Asians and whites, and their offspring see Lee, *Orientalism*; Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*; Li, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery*; Lye, *America's Asia*. Hawai'i also marks another space in which Eurasians were depicted quite differently from mainland perceptions of Eurasians. See Andrea Geiger, *Subverting Exclusion: Transpacific Encounters with Race, Caste, and Borders, 1885-1928* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2011).

appearing in various cultural forms such as songs and plays that collectively portrayed Eurasians as the degenerate and threatening criminal.⁷

Hartmann differentiated himself from these negative portrayals of Eurasians and enacted a more nuanced type of Eurasian identity—one that focused upon his specific maternal ancestry to Japan and which capitalized on the growing attention and rising popularity of Japanese culture, objects, and art on the east coast amongst the upper-class. For Hartmann, being a Japanese-German Eurasian on the east rather than the west coast was much more advantageous to his career, since the massive influx of Japanese and Asian migrant laborers on the west coast had precipitated a racist backlash.⁸ The United States labor movement excluded Asians from labor unionizing.⁹ The labor movement's nativist politics did not have the same impact on the east coast, where there were proportionally fewer Asians, and Japanese people were not perceived as competing against working class whites. Japanese in New York also significantly differed in that they were mostly educated middle-class males, generally students, merchants, or businessmen.¹⁰ By the turn of the century, Japanese immigrants in New York did not experience violence, humiliation, and hostility to the same degree as their west-coast counterparts, but neither were they embraced. Most were still relegated to menial labor positions such as domestic workers regardless of education or training.¹¹ It was serendipitous that Hartmann immigrated to the east coast, where the Japanese population was very small yet the obsession with Japanese

⁷ See Lee, *Orientalism*, chapter 2.

⁸ Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America* (New York: Oxford UP, 2005).

⁹ Lye, *America's Asia*, 19.

¹⁰ Mitziko Sawada, *Tokyo Life: New York Dreams: Urban Japanese Visions of America, 1890-1924* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 14.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

culture was high, particularly among the middle and upper classes.¹² Elite Americans voraciously consumed European culture and participated in the consumption of the Orient, including “chinoiserie, the Egyptian revival, an interest in Buddhism, amusement park belly dances, and fin-de-siècle Japan craze.”¹³ Home renovations of entire rooms or decorations of more modest corners of domestic space borrowed freely from Orientalist trends, Japan, China, or the Middle East themes.¹⁴ Beyond private rooms in homes, public spaces like department stores, clubs, and hotels had internationally themed decorations.¹⁵ East coast socialists did more than just incorporate the Asian goods into their homes, they incorporated the east into their fashion as well. “Chinese silks or crocheted kimonos” and their distinct color, cut, and fit had their moment in the sun.¹⁶

This chapter offers another perspective of Eurasians that can be set in contrast to the prevailing Eurasian image of danger, criminality, and contamination in the United States and instead positions Eurasians as a category that was strategically used to promote but also undermine dominant racial logics. Through an examination of indigenous people of mixed descent and their relationship to United States nation building in the late nineteenth century, Lauren L. Basson argues how racially mixed individuals destabilized racial logics and

¹² There were only 2,039 Japanese on the United States mainland by 1890. See Josephine Lee, *The Japan of Pure Invention: Gilbert and Sullivan's The Mikado* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 64. After 1920, there were more than 4,600 Japanese immigrants in New York, see Sawada, *Tokyo Life*, 13. The total number of Japanese in California alone, according to the 1920 census was 70,000 and that was deemed a conservative estimate, see the Federal Trade Information Service, “The Fourteenth Census of Population in the United States: 1920” (New York and Washington, 1920).

¹³ Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

challenged United States discourses that fostered a white homogenous identity. Basson shows that the “ambiguous structural position of people of mixed descent in U.S. society contributed to their pursuit of a wide variety of political actions that challenged conventional understanding of the state and nation from the margins.”¹⁷ It is not only that Hartmann was mixed race that was a destabilizing force but, extending Basson’s argument, Hartmann’s use of his Eurasian identity as a career strategy can be read as a politicized act that destabilized and challenged the racial conventions of the time period.

An analysis of Hartmann’s life reveals how a mixed race identity was usefully implemented during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century within and beyond bohemia. For instance, Hartmann created and strategically deployed the persona of Sidney Allan to assert himself as a white photography critic, helping him establish close ties with the bohemian artist community. Hartmann’s implicit white identity was performed as a way to enhance his career but it was also assumed, read, and marked by state institutions on official documents such as Hartmann’s marriage license. While Hartmann’s racial ambiguity as mixed race made it easier for him to pass as white and gain the legal privileges of whiteness, Hartmann simultaneously sought out and cultivated a Eurasian identity, in both his lecture presentations and his writing. Hartmann navigated in and out of these racialized identities throughout his lifetime, playfully, yet purposefully, recognizing that his identities were like the clothes he wore; that they could enhance his artistic capabilities and allow him leeway to move more easily between various artistic fields, given the limits that were clearly imposed on non-white people in the United States.

¹⁷ Lauren L. Basson, *White Enough to Be American?: Race Mixing, Indigenous People, and the Boundaries of State and Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 7.

Yet Hartmann also frequently encountered limitations. His performance as a Eurasian, for instance, hinged on, and was contained by, essentialized notions of race and engaged in a type of self-Orientalism and self-objectification. Moreover, in claiming a Eurasian bohemian identity, Hartmann was repeatedly racialized and feminized by the mainstream press and his anarchist identity was not taken seriously. Although Hartmann's play with identity were debilitating in these respects, this chapter builds on Basson's study to see that the elasticity of a mixed race identity could work against established understandings of race and, more importantly, were enhanced by the spatial and ideological communities in which mixed race individuals lived, worked, and played. Hartmann's location on the east coast and within bohemia served as a type of interactive stage and was essential in providing him the flexibility to actively perform these various racialized identities.

Hartmann's move to Greenwich Village in 1889 at age 22 provided a space for him to sharpen a bold, politically charged, and experimental literary voice while also allowing for a flexibility of identities. Carl Sadakichi Hartmann was born on the Island of Dejima (a former Dutch trading post), in Nagasaki, Japan, in 1867 to a German father and a Japanese mother who died shortly after childbirth.¹⁸ In the absence of a mother figure, Hartmann's father moved Carl and his older brother Hidataru to Germany to live with their paternal grandmother. In his unpublished autobiography, Hartmann describes himself as a youth with a voracious appetite for reading and museums, a resistance to social conformity and social norms, and an early love for

¹⁸ Autobiography, undated (circa 1898 and 1935), Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 2, Tomás Rivera Library, University of California, Riverside, CA. Hereafter, cited as Sadakichi Hartmann Papers. November 8, 1867 is the date according to his baptismal certificate. Yet Hartmann expresses weariness as he explains that the exact date of his birth is unknown since his actual birth certificate was lost.

art. When Hartmann was old enough, his father enlisted him in a German naval school.¹⁹ He rebelled, running away from the school. As a result, his father shipped him to Philadelphia in 1882 to live with his paternal aunt and uncle where he began work as a press feeder, lithographic stippler, and negative retoucher.²⁰ Hartmann's travel to the east coast severed his relationship with his father and marked the end of his upper-class lifestyle since he purported in his autobiography to have come to the United States with three dollars in his pocket.

After a happenstance discovery of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and an unannounced visit to Whitman's Camden home in 1884 turned into a friendship, Hartmann built on Whitman's legendary status and large network of literary connections. He published extensively—literature, poetry, art, and photography criticism. The growth of a waged working class in major cities also meant a concomitant growth in the off-duty pursuits of leisure and entertainment and the rising popularity of these genres.²¹ Along the way, Hartmann began to gravitate toward bohemia, likely a partial consequence of Whitman's own bohemianism since Whitman's bohemianism was

¹⁹ Hartmann's early memories did not have a theme or racial focus. In fact, in the seven page autobiography timeline that Hartmann presumably created for the beginning of the book, his publications and lectures comprise six of the seven pages. His early life filled one page and his entry about life in Germany focused on his upper-class status in private school. He notes, "date of arrival in Germany unknown to author. Baptised as Lutheran. Brought up in luxury. Went to private schools in Hamburg and Kiel. Read Schiller and Goethe at the age of nine. Wore uniform for a short while at preparatory naval school at Steinwerder, Hamburg. Ran away from naval school to Paris." Autobiography, undated (circa 1898 and 1935), Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 2.

²⁰ Harry W. Lawton and George Knox, "Introduction," in *The Valiant Knights of Daguerre: Selected Critical Essays on Photography and Photographic Pioneers*, Sadakichi Hartmann, eds. Harry W. Lawton and George Knox (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 8.

²¹ David Haven Blake, *Walt Whitman and the Culture of American Celebrity* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2006), 24. See also Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in the Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1986); Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999).

connected to New York in the 1850s, where bohemians (mostly Anglo American and German immigrants) congregated around Pfaff's saloon, a German beerhouse.²²

The term bohemia first arose in Paris to refer to rebellious art-minded youths as gypsies, who were wrongly assumed to have originated from Bohemia in central Europe. The term gained more notoriety and was increasingly connected to artists as well as literary and cultural intellectuals after the publication of Henri Murger and Theodore Barriere's play *La Vie de Bohème* (1849). The play was based on Murger's depictions of the colorful and impoverished bohemians living in Paris's Latin Quarter. While there was an affinity toward European art and a heavy reliance on bourgeois patronage, New York bohemians were outwardly against class divisions or the pursuit of money. By the twentieth century, bohemians celebrated more ethnic pluralism and transnational diversity while continuing to disavow old Victorian standards or morals.²³ However, bohemians still relished their both real and imagined connections to bohemian Parisians, which they used to claim an elevated and sophisticated culture in Greenwich Village while also welcoming smoking, drinking, wild antics, and loud and boisterous behavior.²⁴ These class contradictions enabled bohemians to interact with both upper-class patrons as well as the working-class population that lived within Greenwich Village. The neighborhood's demographics from 1898 to 1918 illuminate its seedy underbelly of social vices such as alcohol and prostitution as well as the proliferation of upper-class reformers who

²² For more on Hartmann and Whitman's relationship see George Knox and Harry W. Lawton, eds., *Whitman-Hartmann Controversy: Including Conversations with Walt Whitman and Other Essays* (Bern, Herbert Lang; Frankfurt/Main, Peter Lang: 1976).

²³ Levin, *Bohemia in America*. See also Karen Karbiener, "Bridging Brooklyn and Bohemia: How the *Brooklyn Daily Times* Brought Whitman Closer to Pfaff's," in *Whitman among the Bohemians*, eds. Joanna Levin and Edward Whitley (Iowa City: Iowa UP, 2014).

²⁴ McFarland, *Inside Greenwich Village*, 190.

attempted to curb the illegal and illicit activities in the neighborhood.²⁵ The Village bohemians and artists occupied more of a middle ground; they were fascinated by and participated in the gritty amusements within the Village and saw the ethnic diversity in shops and restaurants as indicative of a new egalitarianism.²⁶ The cheap rents, restaurants, and tight-knit artistic community created a desirable location and fostered an image of a bohemian as one who was a “free spirit: playful, expressive, spontaneous, unconventional, and individualistic.”²⁷ However, in the end, everyone had to pay the rent.

Path to Bohemia: Sidney Allan and the Performance and Production of Whiteness

Hartmann cultivated a white, upper-class identity in his professional career prior to his entrance into bohemia and embrace of a bohemian identity. This white identity established him in the art field as an early photography critic and opened doors into bohemia’s artist community. Hartmann’s growth in fame as a leading photography critic paralleled the rise in popularity of the field and the gradual recognition that photography could be perceived as art.²⁸ Much like their

²⁵ McFarland, *Inside Greenwich Village*, 169. McFarland identifies two phases of bohemianism, the first phase is between 1912 and 1916 and he perceives it as the ideal period which cultivated the most “intense intellectual and artistic creativity” and political investment. The second phase he identifies is post-1916, in which tourism, marketing, and increased popularity of the idea of bohemians created a selling-out of bohemianism, 191. I do not mark these phases in the effort to see that, at least for Hartmann, the bohemian community had fostered both of these ideas from the start and I make an effort to show that bohemianism’s artistic and political relationship was complexly tied and enveloped with both apathy and investment.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 190.

²⁸ By the turn of the century, photography had entered into American homes. Increased technological advancements such as quicker shutter speed, flexible plastic film, and cheaper production had created a more efficient process and more accessible products compared to the daguerreotypes of the past. The Kodak box camera, introduced in 1888, allowed consumers to just press a button and mail in their film for development, which effectively helped popularized amateur photography. See Jay Bochner, *An American Lens: Scenes from Alfred Stieglitz’s New York Succession* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2005), 9. Writers often

counterparts in literary and art criticism, photography critics promoted the artistic qualities of photos and carefully analyzed photographs as paintings, even using the same terminology. This was in contrast to those who felt photography was considered only a leisure activity or hobby, not a career in and of itself. Those who denied photography as art saw it as too closely aligned with chemistry to be considered on the same creative level as art.²⁹ Within this burgeoning field and debate, distinguished artists and photographers mentored Hartmann and influentially shaped his perspective and writing. In 1898 Hartmann was asked to write an article on a photography club, called the Camera Club of New York, by the German language newspaper, *Staats-Zeitung*, and it was at this point that Hartmann was first introduced to Alfred Stieglitz.³⁰ The prominent photographer envisioned that photography, like painting, could be classified as an art form.³¹ Through Stieglitz's mentoring and friendship, Hartmann found himself stridently embracing this progressive ideology, including within bohemian circles.

compared photography to the railroad and promoted its scientific, industrious, and mechanical qualities. Photography, without a clear antecedent, erupted onto the scene in 1839. Unlike daguerreotypes that was described more as a process, photography was seen as spontaneous and able to capture nature. See Mary Warner Marien, *Photography and Its Critics: A Cultural History, 1839-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 2; Paul Spencer Sternberger, *Between Amateur and Aesthete: The Legitimization of Photography as Art in America, 1880-1900* (Albuquerque: University of Mexico Press, 2001), xxi.

²⁹ Sternberger, *Between Amateur and Aesthete*, xii-xiii. The most famous critic of art as photography was Joseph Pennell. See Joseph Pennell, "Is Photography Among the Fine Arts?" (1897) in *Photography in Print*, ed. Vicki Goldberg (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), 210-213.

³⁰ Jane Calhoun Weaver ed., *Sadakichi Hartmann: Critical Modernist* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 117.

³¹ Stieglitz's photographs, 291 art gallery, and *Camera Work* journal (1903-1913) were pioneering forces within professional photography and photography criticism. 291, named after its address on Fifth Avenue in New York, opened in 1908, exhibited new and experimental art. According to an article in *Pearson's Magazine*, which bemoaned its closing in 1918, 291 was "the birthplace of modern art in America" and influentially shaped the genre of art and photography. See also G.B., "The Passing of '291,'" in *Pearson's Magazine* (March 1918), 402-403. Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 31.

However, Hartmann's publications on photography criticism were often signed under the name Sidney Allan, or with his actual initials (S.H.), which functioned as a means to gain access and privilege within photography and photography criticism on the east coast.³² Photography and photography criticism were quickly emerging as fields dominated by white men, along with a few white women.³³ Photography critics needed "academic knowledge of art and artistic practice" and needed to be well versed in European and British photography, which was used as an early and ideal model of the direction of American photography.³⁴ Both photography and photography criticism rested on class and cultural elitism that was most accessible to whites despite claims of the field's democratizing tendencies. It makes sense that Hartmann downplayed his Eurasian identity since it was not as useful in legitimizing Hartmann as a serious art and photography critic. Japanese art, while popular, was not initially perceived as on the same level of sophistication as Western art and techniques. Japanese art was seen as at only "the first stage of progress" in regard to their place in the art world.³⁵ Instead, the content of Hartmann's work illustrated his upper-class knowledge including his personal experience in Paris museums or his technical knowledge of Greek art.³⁶ These textual identities as Sidney Allan and S.H. signal Hartmann's deliberate crafting of an implicitly upper-class white identity in an effort to gain legitimacy in the field of photography criticism. It is also important to note that men dominated early photography and photography criticism. While Hartmann intentionally articulated an upper-class white identity, his gender is not something that he showcased to the same degree and

³² S.S.H. "John Donoghue," *Camera Work* 21 (January 1908), Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 19, folder 11. Hartmann used the name Sidney Allan at least up until 1915.

³³ Wexler, *Tender Violence*.

³⁴ Sternberger, *Between Amateur and Aesthete*, 5.

³⁵ Qtd. in Lee, *Japan of Pure Invention*, 11.

³⁶ See Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, Collection 068, box 19.

therefore shows that his position as a male photography critic was likely a privilege that he took for granted.³⁷

Hartmann's embodiment of a white identity went beyond just the written form and also included lecture performances as Sidney Allan. During these lectures Hartmann performed race, which was expressed through his attire. When lecturing on the subject of photography, Hartmann's three-piece suit, monocle, derby hat, and watch chain mimicked his performance of a white educated cultured male and served as props to support his performance as white.³⁸

Whiteness studies scholars have demonstrated the uneven ways that European immigrants gained access to the privileges of whiteness during the late nineteenth and twentieth century.³⁹ In addition to the biological assumptions of race, social and cultural norms such as attire, English-language acquisition, and grooming were also thought of as capable of "whitening" new immigrants.⁴⁰ While many artists and writers took pseudonyms, Hartmann as Sidney Allan erased his Japanese ancestry that conveyed a racial passing that functioned as a professional strategy.

Hartmann successfully passed because his physical features and phenotype made it possible for the audience to read him as white when he wished them to. Passing, according to Gayle Wald, is a transgression of the social boundaries of race and a "practice that emerges from subjects' desire to control the terms of their racial definition, rather than be subject to the

³⁷ See Wexler's *Tender Violence* who makes a similar assertion that the social position of early women photographers was such an intense focus of difference that "the social and political salience of their whiteness went unobserved," 37.

³⁸ Weaver, *Sadakichi Hartmann: Critical Modernist*, 39.

³⁹ For scholarship on whiteness studies see Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*; Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006); Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1994).

⁴⁰ Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 52.

definitions of white supremacy.”⁴¹ The concept of passing has been theorized, usually in the context of African American studies, where some African American and mixed race African Americans passed as free and then after the abolition of slavery, passed as white in order to circumvent discrimination and gain privileges.⁴² These moments of passing were, for some, permanent lifestyle decisions that illustrate genealogical ruptures and moments of familial and community loss, while for others passing was temporary and transitory.⁴³ For Hartmann, passing as Sidney Allan occurred alongside his other identities, including his identity as Sadakichi Hartmann. In some of his published work, he signed his articles with the name Sadakichi Hartmann and also with the name Sidney Allan in brackets below. This was especially true when Hartmann discussed Japanese art and photography. For instance, in an article in *Wilson’s Photographic Magazine* (Dec. 1914), Hartmann favorably described a Japanese photographer in Providence, Rhode Island, whom he called Oki Seizo. He signed using both the name Hartmann and Allan, which allowed the audience to read his race flexibly—as Japanese, white, or even Eurasian. The deployment of these concurrent identities was purposeful. It enabled Hartmann to be positioned as both an upper-class cultured art critic and also signal to the reader an understanding of Japanese art and culture. Jennifer Ann Ho explains that, for multiracial Asian Americans, passing is less about creating a false or hidden identity and more a strategy that undermines racial stability by proclaiming “an identity that might not be apparent at first

⁴¹ Gayle Wald, *Crossing the Line: Racial Passing in Twentieth-Century US Literature and Culture* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000), 6.

⁴² For general scholarship on passing see Kathleen Pfeiffer, *Race Passing and American Individualism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002); Allyson Hobbs, *A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2014); Wald *Crossing the Line*.

⁴³ Hobbs, *A Chosen Exile*.

glance.”⁴⁴ For Hartmann, his identity as Sidney Allan did not attempt to permanently conceal his Japanese ancestry or conceal a “true” racial identity. However, his temporary passing did lay claim to white privilege, even if that was simply a byproduct of his desire to create professional legitimacy based upon his European culture and knowledge.

Hartmann’s racial ambiguity and mixed race made it possible to foreground an upper-class white identity that inevitably came with tangible social benefits and legal privileges of whiteness, beyond just securing a foothold in American photography art criticism. For instance, Hartmann’s mixed race identity did not inhibit his ability to marry his wife, Elizabeth Blanche Walsh, in 1891.⁴⁵ Despite his birthplace of Japan and his mother being listed as Japanese, Hartmann is listed as white on his marriage certificate (figure 1.1).⁴⁶ Marriage has served as an institution that has vehemently policed racial borders and actively patrolled and classified those

⁴⁴ Ho, *Racial Ambiguity in Asian American Culture*.

⁴⁵ Weaver, *Sadakichi Hartmann*, 45. In 1907, having been well rooted within the bohemian community, Hartmann started seeing another woman, Lillian Bonham. Entries from Bonham’s diaries suggest that she was aware of Hartmann’s marital status and as well as his many other extramarital affairs and which correlated to Hartmann’s engagement in, and promotion of, bohemian ideas of free love. For more information on bohemian ideologies on gender and sexuality see Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Levin, *Bohemia in America*; Andrea Barnett, *All-Night Party: The Women of Bohemian Greenwich Village and Harlem 1913-1930* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2004); George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994). Hartmann’s relationship with Bonham interestingly shows how Hartmann’s radicalism within bohemia was predicated upon Bonham ascribing to traditional gender roles so that Hartmann could perform a type of bohemianism that was unattached to children, domesticity, and a sedentary lifestyle. See Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 42.

⁴⁶ Carl Sadakichi Hartman certificate of marriage to Elizabeth Blanch Walsh (July 9, 1891), New York, New York City Department of Records.

STATE OF NEW YORK
 City of New York, No. 8380

I Henry Carillo Not. C. Sadakichi Hartmann and
 Eliza Blanche Walsh were joined in Marriage
 by me as deputed with the laws of the State of New York, in the City of New York,
 this 9th day of July 1891
 Signature of Minister of the Gospel, Joseph E. Neudun

Date of Marriage	July 9-1891
Groom's Full Name	C. Sadakichi Hartmann
Bride's	Eliza Blanche Walsh
Age	24 yrs
Color	White
Single or Widowed	Single
Place of Birth	Japan
Father's Name	Green
Mother's Maiden Name	J. O'Sadday
Number of Groom's Marriage	First
Bride's Full Name	Eliza Blanche Walsh
Bride's	214 E-18th
Age	29 yrs
Color	White
Single or Widowed	Single
Maiden Name, if a Widow	
Place of Birth	Peru
Father's Name	John
Mother's Maiden Name	Blanche
Number of Bride's Marriage	First
Name of Ecclesiastical Authority	Joseph E. Neudun
Official Station	Justice City Court
Address	455 7th Street
Date of Record	July 9th 1891

Figure 1.1 Carl Sadakichi Hartmann marriage certificate to Elizabeth Blanche Walsh, New York, 1891, New York City Department of Records

considered foreign and thus deemed as unable to marry in the eyes of the state.⁴⁷ Asian miscegenation laws manufactured, shaped, and normalized a racial structuring within the United States that called for a protection of whiteness—particularly white womanhood.⁴⁸ Miscegenation laws might have impeded Hartmann’s ability to marry Walsh, who was white. However, these laws were unevenly implemented and varied state by state, with greater attention paid to the west coast.⁴⁹ New York, the state in which Hartmann married Walsh, did not have miscegenation laws.⁵⁰ Additionally, Hartmann’s earlier immigration and naturalization in 1882 at the New York Supreme Court preceded other laws that forbade interracial marriage between Asian men and white women and which were not implemented until the early twentieth century.⁵¹ Another obstacle was marriage clerks since, for many couples, the way their race was recorded depended entirely on the perceptions of the marriage clerk that issued their marriage license. Marriage clerks used the bureaucratic process to assign, track, and act as gatekeepers or administratively

⁴⁷ Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*; Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000).

⁴⁸ Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, chapter 3.

⁴⁹ By 1913, only Nebraska, Montana, and Nevada had laws that specifically identified Japanese or Chinese and prevented them from marrying whites. Arizona, California, Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming prevented whites from marrying Chinese or “Mongolians.” Cott, *Public Vows*, 145. See also David H. Fowler, *Northern Attitudes toward Interracial Marriage: Legislation and Public Opinion in the Middle Atlantic and the States of Old Northwest 1780-1930* (New York: Garland, 1987).

⁵⁰ It may have been the case, however, that moving to another state with miscegenation laws would have invalidated their marriage.

⁵¹ These laws included the 1922 Cable Act which stripped white women of their citizenship if they married men ineligible for naturalization or the 1908 Gentlemen’s Agreement, which prevented further Japanese immigration. Since Hartmann’s immigration from Germany, naturalization, and marriage occurred prior to the twentieth century, these laws did not significantly impact his experience. The main instrument proposed between the 1890s and the 1910s to discriminate among immigrants was a literacy test, although usually reserved for older male immigrants (typically over the age of sixteen).” See Cott, *Public Vows*, 149. Hartmann’s immigration occurred at a young age which meant he likely did not have to take a literacy test either (although no documents make significant mention of the details of his immigration experience).

uphold white supremacy.⁵² While phenotype played a role in how marriage clerks racially identified people, clearly Hartmann's English, westernized manners, and naturalization were factors in his ability to marry Walsh and contributed to his marriage certificate listing his race as white. This was also a particularly crucial period in the creation, maintenance, and policing of the classification of whiteness. Hartmann's marriage to Walsh in New York, despite one of his public and performed identities as Eurasian, granted Hartmann the legal privilege of whiteness but was also enabled by the desire of the state to read Hartmann as a white male in order to make interracial marriage invisible.⁵³ Hartmann's whiteness, therefore, aided in the illusion that interracial marriage was a national statistical rarity.⁵⁴

Within Bohemia: The Rhetoric and Embrace of Racial Appropriation and Racial

Transcendence as Eurasian

Hartmann's extensive writing and lectures on photography, art, and culture were heavily indebted to his knowledge of European art and culture and fostered a greater acceptance and popularity within bohemian circles. While Hartmann's entrance into bohemia was paved by the photography and literary connections he established as Sidney Allan, Hartmann's identity within bohemia was grounded more upon the production of a Eurasian identity. Throughout his lifetime, Hartmann's lecture topics (as Sadakichi Hartmann) were widely diverse, covering subjects from romance, poetry, his interactions with Walt Whitman, Russian literature, to the science behind

⁵² Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, 139.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* See also Teng, *Eurasian* who notes a similar phenomenon between the marriage of Yung Wing and Mary Kellogg in 1875 in Connecticut. Their marriage was possible because of the lack of solidified miscegenation laws and Wing's mass wealth and financial success.

memory and dreams.⁵⁵ His lectures also addressed Japanese art, poetry, and culture. However, regardless of the particular lecture topic, Hartmann marked a specific Eurasian identity through his self-made lecture flyers, which were used to introduce his identity to his audience and functioned to shape audience anticipation and expectations. The nationally organized public lecturing circuit, an outgrowth of lyceums from the 1820s and 1830s, was commonly reserved only for middle and upper-class male intellectuals who were considered authority figures on their topics.⁵⁶ The lecturing circuit was presented as a democratizing form where the audience legitimized forms of knowledge through their attendance (rather than by authoritarian imposition) and although it included people of color and women, it was dominated by northern, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, men.⁵⁷ Within New York's bohemia, lecturers and young intellectuals, or those that held generational opposition to Victorian norms and bourgeois culture, were educated in colleges like Harvard, Yale, and to a lesser extent, Columbia.⁵⁸ In contrast to the typical lecturer, Hartmann was self-educated, having dropped out of school at a young age. This was likely not an issue also because bohemians proclaimed distaste toward class elitism.

⁵⁵ See Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, boxes 28, folder 2 & 18 & 19; Box 11D, folder 1, and box 12, folder "Van Duzzee, Edward P." There is not a substantial amount of content beyond the title of some of Hartmann's lectures although some of the content seemed like it was reiterated and recycled in his published articles. However, on undated stationary Hartmann wrote "always scribbled down a few notes (starting points) before lecture and hardly ever used the same notes again. Frequently only title of lecture remained the same, while contents were new or different." Undated stationary, Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 7, folder "Notes for Lectures."

⁵⁶ Blake, *Walt Whitman and the Culture of American Celebrity*, 35.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 57. Gaining popularity in the 1820s and 1830s, lyceums were used as a way "to instruct working-class men in both the practical sciences and virtue. Individuals with particular expertise would instruct their townsmen on the kinds of skills and knowledge that would help them become more successful members of community," 32. Lectures were held in public spaces like churches, schools, and more private areas like homes.

⁵⁸ Thomas Bender, *New York Intellect: A History of Intellectual Life in New York City, from 1750 to the Beginnings of Our Own Time* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987), 234.

Hartmann marketed his lectures through his racialization as Eurasian, which helped to divert the fact that Hartmann lacked a formal education, spoke with a thick German accent, and emigrated from Japan at a very early age with little to no Japanese language skills. His knowledge of some of his topics, like Japan, were only from secondary sources, as a byproduct of extensive reading in libraries.⁵⁹ Yet in one lecture bill, the text boldly proclaims that Hartmann will provide “The Latest from the Orient” and “A Trip to Japan in 16 minutes.”⁶⁰ Generally speaking, lecturers had to coordinate lecture sites, gather their audiences, and build momentum and opportunity through the medium of newsprint. This meant that newspapers, handbills, and flyers were primary publicity sites.⁶¹ Early lyceum-based lecture series were straightforward and announcements often included only basic information such as location, date, time, price, and sponsoring committees.⁶² In contrast, Hartmann’s more elaborate flyers had exaggerated drawings of his face, featuring small eyes and wild hair, which were requested by Hartmann and drawn by his mistress, Lillian Bonham (figure 1.2).⁶³ This particular flyer shows the diversity of Hartmann’s lecture topics and yet his marketing, despite the fact that his topics on the flyer do not address the Orient, highlights his “German-Japanese-American” ancestry in both text and by image. Another flyer, specifically geared toward vendors, promote Hartmann’s lecture on “Japan, as it really is” (figure 1.3). It is plain, listing the necessary details of location, time, and price. Since there are no visual ornaments to grab the reader’s attention, the reader gravitates toward the middle of the flyer to the quotes extracted from the *Boston Evening Transcript* and *New York Sun*. The quote from the *Boston Evening Transcript* states, “the author

⁵⁹ “A Youngster Dons Mikado Garb,” Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 8.

⁶⁰ Undated flyer, Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 28, folder 2.


⁶¹ Blake, *Walt Whitman and the Culture of American Celebrity*, 122.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ “Lilian Bonham Diary, Jan. 20, 1909 – July 4, 1909.” Sadakichi Hartmann Papers.

Sadakichi Hartmann

The Famous Japanese-German-American
Writer, Critic and Philosopher
In a Series of Lectures
on Literary Subjects.



1 MONDAY **4 THURSDAYS**

APRIL 26 <i>Oscar Wilde</i>	MAY 20 <i>Anatole France</i>
MAY 6 <i>Edgar Allen Poe</i>	MAY 27 <i>Walt Whitman</i>
MAY 13 <i>On Russian Literature</i>	

AT FORWARD HALL
175 E. BROADWAY

LECTURES COMMENCE AT 8.15 P. M. ADMISSION 35c.

5 WEDNESDAYS

APRIL 28 - <i>Has prohibition Esthetic Value?</i> <i>Great Men I Have Drunk with</i>	MAY 19 - <i>The Aftermath of the War.</i> <i>Str. Oliver Lodge and Materializations</i>
MAY 5 - <i>Is There any Romance left in Life?</i> <i>A Study of Joseph Conrad</i>	MAY 26 - <i>Are We Ignorant of Our Own</i> <i>Proportions?</i>
MAY 12 - <i>Do Dreams Influence Our Lives.!</i> <i>An Analysis of the Freudian Philosophy</i>	<i>An Exposition of Einstein's New Scientific Theories</i>

AT THE RAND SCHOOL AUDITORIUM
7 EAST 15TH STREET

LECTURES COMMENCE AT 8.15 P. M. ADMISSION 35c.

5 FRIDAYS

APRIL 30 <i>On Russian Literature</i>	MAY 21 <i>Edgar Allen Poe</i>
MAY 7 <i>Anatole France</i>	MAY 28 <i>Walt Whitman</i>
MAY 14 <i>Oscar Wilde</i>	

AT 4 A. D. SOCIALIST HEADQUARTERS
1258 BOSTON ROAD, NEAR 169TH ST.

LECTURES COMMENCE AT 8.15 P. M. ADMISSION 35c.

SADAKICHI HARTMANN—
AS SEEN BY SOME OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES—
A Japanese primitive with the soul of a Schopenhauer — *J. G. Huneker*
You say Sadakichi represents the Orient. He represents a good deal more than that, more than you fellows think.
His candor and directness are admirable. — *John Burroughs* *Walt Whitman*
The most mysterious personality in American letters — *Amy Lowell*
A critical Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde — *New York Life*
The man behind the mask. — *Los Angeles Graphic*
A tornado in a peach orchard. — *Detroit News*

WATCH FOR ANNOUNCEMENTS ABOUT
“Frank Harris Lectures”
UNDER THE SEAL OF




Figure 1.2 “Sadakichi Hartmann: The Famous Japanese-German-American” flyer, undated, Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 24, courtesy of Tomás Rivera Library at the University of California, Riverside

MR. SADAKICHI HARTMANN

the well known author

begs to announce that he will accept engagements throughout
the country for next season to deliver his lecture:

"JAPAN, AS IT REALLY IS"

(illustrated by 100 slides)

The author knows Japan well, and his
half Japanese parentage gives him free en-
trance to the Japanese heart so that he
thoroughly understands matters concealed
from foreign eyes.

BOSTON EVENING TRANSCRIPT.

After listening to the lecture one is
under the impression of having crossed the
Pacific and paid an actual visit to the
Land of Chrysanthemums.

NEW YORK SUN.

TERMS: \$100-

If the selected date will fit in with
the dates previously booked no extra charge
for traveling expenses will be made.)

For dates and particulars address:

SADAKICHI HARTMANN
POND PLACE
BEDFORD PARK
NEW YORK CITY.

Figure 1.3 "Japan as it Really Is" Flyer, undated, Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068,
box 28, courtesy of Tomás Rivera Library at the University of California, Riverside

knows Japan well, and his half Japanese parentage gives him free entrance to the Japanese heart so that he thoroughly understands matters concealed from foreign eyes.”⁶⁴ Hartmann’s choice of quote illuminates both the public’s perception of Hartmann as someone with partial Japanese ancestry and Hartmann’s desire to promote that identity. The *Boston Evening Transcript* also naturalizes his racialized identity as someone *innately* knowledgeable of Japan. His knowledge of Japan is presumed to be legitimate because of his family genealogy and easily functions in place of credentials or a degree.

While Hartmann lured audiences to his lectures using their assumptions of his innate knowledge of Asian culture, he also cleverly marked his lectures for a general audience. Directly underneath the quote from the *Boston Evening Transcript* is a second quote from the *New York Sun* that states, “after listening to the lecture one is under the impression of having crossed the Pacific and paid an actual visit to the Land of Chrysanthemums.”⁶⁵ Unlike the first quote, which validates Hartmann as a lecturer on Japan, the second quote focuses on the vendors’ potential audience. The guarantee is that the audience will have a pleasurable experience akin to traveling to Japan but without having to leave the comfort of their city. In this instance, Hartmann widens his target audience and potential earnings by seeking audiences that would probably not be able to afford an actual trip to Japan. Since lectures were typically inexpensive educational activities but also modes of entertainment, his marketing strategy points toward his astute understanding of the voyeuristic desires of the audience, which cut across class lines.⁶⁶ In another flyer advertisement, Hartmann provides the option of bringing a cushion to sit in

⁶⁴ *Boston Evening Transcript*, Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 28, folder 2, “Lecture tour flyers, 1904-1906.”

⁶⁵ Undated flyer, Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 28, folder 2.

⁶⁶ Blake, *Walt Whitman and the Culture of American Celebrity*, 32-33. See Enstad, *Ladies of Labor*, and Peiss, *Cheap Amusements* for a history of how women engaged in leisure.

“Oriental Fashion” through the lecture.⁶⁷ Hartmann offers an all-inclusive package deal to the audience, who gets to look at a Japanese Eurasian, listen to a topic on Japan, and experience the feel of Japan by sitting in “Oriental fashion” on the floor. Orientalism, through the consumption of the Orient within United States culture, served to racially and culturally mark difference.⁶⁸ Yet Hartmann destabilizes the inequity of power and domination between whites and the Other. He mediates and filters the exchange, choosing what the audience hears and the terms by which the audience interacts with his lecture. Hartmann uses his liminal status as a Eurasian to gain a type of popularity that was based upon the audiences’ desires to consume the Orient, produced in a manner that was unthreatening and contained within popular culture, and relied on the rising trend toward Japanese culture and goods.

When Japan opened to foreign trade in 1853, the result was the “Japan craze,” or the proliferation of Orientalist scholars and writings, as well as the consumption, by United States and Europe, of cultural entertainment and productions about Japan.⁶⁹ Western audiences clamored for plays like *The Mikado* (1885), Winnifred Eaton’s *A Japanese Nightingale* (1901) and the notorious and multiple cultural reproductions of *Madame Butterfly*, all of which resembled the potential bridging of the east and west as well as the inherent irreconcilability.⁷⁰ Much of the popularity of Japanese and, more broadly, Oriental goods was related to the fact that there was a growing body of authority figures, most notably Edward S. Morse, Ernest Fenellosa

⁶⁷ Undated flyer [1926 or 1937], Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 28, folder “1926.”

⁶⁸ Said, *Orientalism*; Yoshihara, *Embracing the East*; Lee, *Orientalism*; Hoganson *Consumers’ Imperium* for how Orientalism functioned discursively in the Middle East as well as within the context of United States culture.

⁶⁹ Lee, *The Japan of Pure Invention*.

⁷⁰ Donald Kirihaara, “The Accepted Idea: Stereotype and Sessue Hayakawa,” in *Birth of Whiteness: Race and the Emergence of US Cinema*, ed. Daniel Leonard Bernardi (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1996).

and Lafcadio Hearn, who actively shaped western audiences' knowledge of, and interest in, the Orient. Those from Japan also capitalized on the "Japan craze" and helped to form western perceptions of Japan and the east. In Salem, Massachusetts, Bunkio Matsuki imported Japanese merchandise for American consumers and used his Japanese identity to entice customers by "lending an aura of authenticity" to his merchandise.⁷¹ Kakuzō Okakura, a Japanese writer and artist, dramatically used "cultural cross-dressing as a strategy of self-presentation" by wearing a kimono during his trips to Boston as a mechanism to gain attention.⁷²

Like Matsuki and Okakura, Hartmann recognized the importance of constructing a racialized and costumed identity as a way to capitalize on the rising demand for Japanese and Oriental goods and culture. In 1889, as part of his performance, Hartmann rented a Japanese kimono as seen in the play, *Mikado*, and then lectured at Hotel Vendome in Boston (figure 1.4).⁷³ Hartmann recalls in an unpublished piece, "A Youngster Dons Mikado Garb" that at least initially, he "lectured neither on Japanese art and literature nor its temples, pagodas and flower arrangements, but talked a lot about possible Japanese relatives that I did not know while neglecting my German ancestry that was worth while and which I knew well."⁷⁴ This hints toward Hartmann's underlying ambivalence in the promotion of his Japanese ancestry that, at least initially, he attempted to steer clear from Orientalizing Japan in his lecture content by *not* talking about "temples, "pagodas," and "flower arrangements." However, Hartmann was dressed

⁷¹ Yoshihara, *Embracing the East*. See also Hina Hirayama, "Curious Merchandise: Bunkio Matsuki's Japanese Department," in "*A Pleasing Novelty*": *Bunkio Matsuki and the Japan Craze in Victorian Salem* (Salem: Peabody & Essex Museum, 1993), 94.

⁷² Christine Guth, "Charles Longfellow and Okakura Kakuzō: Cultural Cross-Dressing in the Colonial Context," *Positions* 8.3 (Winter 2000), 607. Guth also describes how Okakura wore Chinese style attire during his trip to China in 1893 and Taoist robes in India in 1902 which signify Kakuzō's tourism and "colonialist ambitions," 630.

⁷³ "A Youngster Dons Mikado Garb," Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 8.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*



Figure 1.4 Photograph of Sadakichi Hartmann in “Mikado garb,” 1889, Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 49, folder 2, courtesy of Tomás Rivera Library at the University of California, Riverside

in a kimono and relied on the popularity of the *Mikado* in a very Orientalizing and strategic fashion. Josephine Lee argues in *Japan of Pure Invention: Gilbert and Sullivan's the Mikado* that the popular play represented an imagined and idealized version of Japan with constructed western fantasies that were not factual or accurate. With the proliferation of Mikado objects and costumes like swords, parasols, porcelain, kimonos, and fans, “performers could transform themselves into Japanese through formulaic racial gestures” and whites could dress up as Japanese without the need to understand or thoroughly engage with Japanese culture.⁷⁵

Hartmann’s costumed lectures were for the delight of his audience who were typically working, middle, and upper-class men and women and also likely typical consumers of Oriental artifacts and goods.⁷⁶ For instance, white middle-class women were liberated by their acquisition of Oriental goods, which expanded their cultural capital and ability to explore the world through these commodities.⁷⁷ Hartmann’s performance of a Japanese identity fit perceptions of these audience members, whose ideas about Japan and Japanese people were stoked by productions such as *The Mikado*. In other words, Hartmann’s performance in a Mikado costume reinforced the fantastical version of Japan and Japanese people. Hartmann could be white with the simple change of clothes and new name. Or, he could be Eurasian by wearing Japanese attire. Hartmann skillfully used cultural cross-dressing to appeal to his audiences’ desires, and he happily obliged their delight in, and acceptance of, these identities.

Hartmann’s strategic use of his Eurasian identity can be read as a type of “self-tropicalization”—one that is *both* critical parody and uncritical gimmick. Frances R. Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman’s notion of “tropicalizations” show the ways in which culture can

⁷⁵ Lee, *Japan of Pure Invention*, 31.

⁷⁶ Blake, *Walt Whitman and the Culture of American Celebrity*.

⁷⁷ Yoshihara, *Embracing the East*, 17.

be a site of *both* commodification and resistance. Extending Edward Said's "Orientalism" and Mary Louise Pratt's "transculturation," "tropicalizations" focuses on United States Latino/a identity and emphasizes the "polydirectional and multivocal approach to the politics of representation" in ways that challenge the proscribed distances between the center and margin or subject and object, and instead "subverts and undermines these dualities, rendering them porous rather than dogmatic and antithetical."⁷⁸ Using "self-tropicalization" in the context of mixed race (beyond a Latino/a identity) also challenges the conventional power dynamics of monoraciality more broadly. Instead of a static racial logic that pits racial deception against racial authenticity (both of which relies on, and affirms, monoraciality as more authentic), Hartmann's racial self-tropicalization is empowering precisely because of its resistance to this dualism. Instead, Hartmann's lecturing positioned him on both the cultural margin as Eurasian and at the center of the east coast's fascination of the Orient. Hartmann relied on his performance as a Eurasian as a way to capitalize on cultural voyeurism while also distancing himself from his white audience, illustrating an awareness of the biological and static assumptions of race. However, his racial performances were certainly not all that transgressive since his ability to exploit the malleability of race promoted and relied on notions of racial essentialism.

Performing a type of racial essentialism ensured that white attendees could easily consume the fantastical version of the Orient through Hartmann's body, lecture, and atmosphere, and yet provided an avenue of empowerment and mobility within Hartmann's professional career. For instance, Hartmann used the public's Oriental fascination to mold himself into an expert artist and art critic on all things Japanese, beyond just his lectures. He published numerous

⁷⁸ Frances R. Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman, eds., *Tropicalization: Transcultural Representations of Latinidad* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997), 14.

articles dedicated to Japanese art as well as books such as *Japanese Art* (1903), which was a cursory look at Japanese art history and *Tanka and Haikai: Japanese Rhythms* (1916). In one review of Hartmann's book on Japanese art, he was favorably compared to people who were considered expert Orientalist critics such as John La Farge, Ernest Francisco Fenollosa, and Arthur Dow.⁷⁹ Hartmann quickly embraced his role as Orientalist expert, evident in his 1904 magazine article titled "The Japanese Conception of Poetry."⁸⁰ In the article, Hartmann attempts to reveal the intricacies, motivation, and devices behind Japanese poems. Hartmann notes that tanka comes across in characteristic as "vague and dreamy, and yet so suggestive style of Japanese poetry." One that he describes later as like music "made for the soul of a different humanity."⁸¹ Like some of his art criticism, Hartmann's essentialized ideas bear an obvious Orientalizing nature and were often unsubstantiated. For instance, in the article, Hartmann acknowledges the difficulty in translating poems from English to Japanese. After listing a translated poem he explains, "the translation is as nearly as possible literal, endeavoring at the same time to imitate some rhythmical peculiarities."⁸² Hartmann's early emigration from Japan, his upbringing with his German side of the family, and strong German connections on the east coast, make it difficult to assume that Hartmann spoke Japanese and could translate the poems himself. While the sentence makes no specific claim that Hartmann is the translator, its syntax is written in a more authoritarian tone, and attempts to show his expert opinion through a presumed

⁷⁹ Untitled Book Review, Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 23, "Scrapbook 1893-1911."

⁸⁰ Sadakichi Hartmann, "The Japanese Conception of Poetry," in *Reader Magazine* 3.2 (January 1904), Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 19, folder 11.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

familiarity with the Japanese language.⁸³ As these examples assert, Hartmann's self-tropicalizing shows that even as he and other Asians were subject to the Orientalist thinking of the audience he also participated in a self-Orientalism that reinforced the belief that race was innate and biological. Self-tropicalizing provided opportunities to advance Hartmann's career and created the perception that he was an authority figure of the Orient.

While we might easily see Hartmann as fooling the public and helping to perpetuate a falsified and imaginary version of the Orient in order to garner ticket sales, Hartmann can be described as what Daphne Brooks calls in *Bodies in Dissent* a "morally ambiguous maverick" who distills and blurs the moment between racial deception and racial authenticity.⁸⁴ "Morally ambiguous mavericks" were individuals who were, to varying degrees, opportunistic, deceitful, and self-serving yet whose voices are dismissed, despite the fact that their actions destabilized racial logics while empowering them personally and/or professionally.⁸⁵ Brooks positions racial and gender performance, like that of actress Adah Isaacs Menken's, as a strategy to claim and reimagine a transatlantic African American subjectivity and cultural identity that was polyvalent through its resistance in idealizing white womanhood, yet maintained the privileged in being read visually as white.⁸⁶ Menken's self-spun life narratives were contradictory, fantastical and mobilized as a publicity stunt yet disruptive in their distance from a distinct acceptance of either a

⁸³ Not everyone was convinced of Hartmann's authoritarian knowledge of the Orient. A reviewer in the *Chicago Dial* (1904) declared that the Japanese names are misspelled and even some of the art is, according to the reviewer, positioned upside down in his book on Japanese Art. *Chicago Dial* (1904). Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 23, "Scrapbook 1893-1911."

⁸⁴ Daphne A. Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 132.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 146.

black identity or a white identity.⁸⁷ Brooks usefully reads Menken's racially coded performances and risqué exhibitions as "radically [using] her body as a performative instrument of subjectivity rather than existing merely as an object of spectatorial ravishment and domination."⁸⁸ Similarly, Hartmann used the Orientalist logics of his audience to craft his own subjectivity that resisted an exclusively white or Eurasian identity. He can be read not as an objectified victim but as a willing participant who saw self-Orientalizing as one avenue for achieving autonomy as an artist, particularly because Hartmann had complete creative freedom over his lectures and artistic content. Hartmann's heterogeneous and eclectic modes of cultural claiming and self-representational performance of various racial identities illuminates the ways that he, like Menken, found value in performing various identities that were based upon a privileged visual ambiguity and resistant to a single monolithic racialized identity. As Eurasian, Hartmann could enact a type of subjectivity, autonomy, and gain power as an artist, despite an accommodation of the audience's Orientalist expectations. Hartmann's performance as a Eurasian was also mutually beneficial, for both Hartmann as well as for the bohemian community.

Within the bohemian community, Hartmann's Eurasian identity exemplified a desire for Japanese culture as well as the ideal projection of bohemian sensibility and vision—one that was exotic, bizarre, and yet also quintessentially cosmopolitan. Within bohemia, cosmopolitanism assuaged the threat of immigration, highlighted diversity, and was attractive because "it suggested cultural possibilities beyond assimilation or hyphenated Americanism" where the future could be imagined.⁸⁹ These grandiose characteristics fit with bohemian's embrace of idealistic dreamers, intellectual thinkers, poets, and artists. Through its embrace of Hartmann's

⁸⁷ Ibid., 147.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 137.

⁸⁹ Levin, *Bohemia in America*, 314.

hybridity and cosmopolitanism, the bohemian community laid claim to egalitarianism and race transcendence. Tavia Nyong'o's genealogy of the African American hybrid in *The Amalgamation Waltz* suggests that the racial hybrid is always in a constant state of deferral where "national transcendence of race" through racial hybridity is granted a "peculiar privilege and power of a horizon, one at which we never quite arrive."⁹⁰ Nyong'o counters contemporary attempts to posit racial transcendence through racial hybridity as a new phenomenon and argues against the idea of "hybridity discourse" as "presentist."⁹¹ Instead, he examines mixed race African Americans in the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth century to show that although obfuscated, racial hybridity was used to evoke both fear and desire for restorative racial transcendence and held hope for black emancipation and racial equality.⁹² Similarly, the bohemian community framed Hartmann's hybridity through the lens of cosmopolitanism that cloyingly gestured to a type of radical racial emancipation within the United States.

Hartmann's cosmopolitanism helped to structure bohemia by serving as an ideal example of the ideologies, values, and people that existed in bohemia. *Bruno's Weekly*, which published weekly articles of, by, and about bohemia and Greenwich Village life and served to bridge the general public and the bohemian community, helpfully declared that, "to be cosmopolitan means to be big, to be high above small hatred and petty jealousy and ill-directed ambition. It means to be a brother to mankind, a fellow-builder to this world."⁹³ Described in an article in *Bruno's Weekly* by Joseph Lewis French, Hartmann is described along a similar vein as a "citizen of the

⁹⁰ Tavia Nyong'o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 9.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 24.

⁹³ Guido Bruno, "Les Confidences: Being the Confessions of a Self-made American," *Bruno's Weekly*, 2.18 (April 29, 1916), 650.

world” because of his birth in Japan, German education, American naturalization, and marriage to white woman Elizabeth Blanche Walsh.⁹⁴ Hartmann is embraced by bohemia through the celebratory rhetoric of cosmopolitanism. French, in praising Hartmann’s literary works, describes:

Here was poet, philosopher, prophet, artist, combined in one, pouring forth words that held their souls ravished as though they strayed in an enchanted garden. If this world were not after all this world, and the limitations of the poet bound to its representation, one might almost say that Sadakichi held the key to Paradise. It seemed to be almost literally another sphere into which he led his auditors evening after evening.⁹⁵

While this passage touts Hartmann as embodying the keys to transform the world to a paradise, the qualifiers of “if” and “almost” points to an unrealizable act, one of a future that is desired but deferred. In this example, Hartmann could straddle both the possibility and embrace of a future where race is transcended without needing to specify its vision in a tangible manner. Like white audience members who used Hartmann’s lecture and performance to shape their idealized visions of the Orient, bohemians depicted Hartmann as cosmopolitan to shape an idealized image of themselves as radically post-racial and as the embodiment of utopian racial possibilities. In other words, Hartmann’s mixed race identity was advantageously used by the bohemian community in its own romanticized self-constructed identity.

Yet as Nyong’o has asserted, racial hybridity, although historically recognized, is always in a constant state of deferral, and the post-race space that racial hybridity signifies never quite

⁹⁴ Joseph Lewis French, “Sadakichi Hartmann—A Lifelong Struggle,” *Bruno’s Weekly*. 2.22 (May 27, 1916), Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 23, “Scrapbook from 1893-1911.”

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

arrives. Instead of threatening the existing order of race, depictions of Hartmann's perceived singularity point to a view of exceptionalism and the anticipated, but not yet arrived, racial state. French's article even declared that if there was another man (other than Hartmann) who could be more entitled to be considered cosmopolitan, he has yet to be discovered.⁹⁶ Traditionally cosmopolitanism has been defined against local and national loyalties and was taken to assume a type of universalism or universal community. Many scholars have pushed against this definition, most notably Henry Yu who argues in *Thinking Orientals* that cosmopolitan interest in the Orient was, "the deracinated, universal perspective removed from all points in space [and] was imagined by elite white intellectuals as the embrace of all. In fact, it was an extolment of elite whiteness, a collection of the exotic, while it denied the relevance of the privilege and power of the collector."⁹⁷ Positioning Hartmann as cosmopolitan in many ways functioned to uphold the systematic privileging of whiteness through the very framing of a racial utopia only existent in the future, not the present.

The tokenism of Hartmann's mixed race as the proof of bohemian cosmopolitanism was reinforced through bohemia's consumption of racialized bodies and goods, which were also used as convenient props for entertainment, fascination, and amusement. Bohemian and mainstream attitudes converged at embodying a desire of the voyeuristic consumption of the Other. Mabel Dodge's infamous salon in Greenwich Village was said to be stuffed with items from China and

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York: Oxford UP, 2001), 89. See also Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, eds., *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2006). See also Hoganson *Consumers' Imperium*, which connects cosmopolitanism to domesticity to argue that cosmopolitanism worked in the service of United States and European empire.

Japan. Carl Van Vechten, bohemian writer and artist whose art relied on photographing black male nudes, was a regular at Mabel Dodge's salon. Van Vechten even brought two black entertainers from Harlem to Dodge's salon one night, most likely as a spectacle to shock the crowd.⁹⁸ Chad Heap argues that bohemians partook in a type of slumming, yet differentiated themselves from others in that they professed to rest upon political or aesthetic concerns, attempting to elevate themselves and their actions. However, he argues, their trips were actually not very different from other slummers.⁹⁹ In this sense, Harlem's thriving art community was not always based upon mutual respect and admiration but at times it was a source of exploitation and fetishization, particularly for bohemians like Van Vechten.¹⁰⁰ Bohemia functioned as a type of sensibility that at times justified appropriation in the name of art, worked in the service of a privileged bohemianism, maintained the ideologies of elite white intellectuals, and yet helped propel an image of a racially progressive community. Ann Douglass holds a more ambivalent position where she situates Van Vetchen's delight in Harlem as an appreciation of a black aesthetic and a result of the mutual transgression of the color line, which was liberating for both whites and blacks because it allowed both groups "the right to appropriate anything that caught their fancy for their own needs."¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Leslie Fishbein, *Rebels in Bohemia: The Radical of The Masses, 1911-1917* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 163.

⁹⁹ Heap, *Slumming*, 154.

¹⁰⁰ Van Vechten not only explored Harlem's "underbelly" for the benefit of writing sensationalized stories and novels but he often served as a guide for whites who wanted to visit Harlem. See Ann Douglass, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995).

¹⁰¹ Douglass *Terrible Honesty*, 299. That is not to say that African Americans were not outraged at the depictions of Harlem and the use of African American culture for bohemians. Ann Douglass' *Terrible Honesty* notes that W.E.B. DuBois and D.L. Lawrence were vocally opposed to Van Vetchen's depictions of Harlem in his book, *Nigger Heaven* (1926), as both imagined and desired a more middle-class image of African Americans, 288.

Bohemia was a complex site that was not simply based upon racial appropriation and exploitation of racialized bodies. For instance, the very presence of women in the public spaces of bohemia, like Pfaff's or as performers onstage, served as a challenge to the dominant perception of sexual morality.¹⁰² The African American community also had a thriving black bohemia, as described in James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. This bohemia was one that was conceived as an alternative cultural space or an "in-betweenness" that preceded the Harlem Renaissance and where a specific African American culture and music could be expressed.¹⁰³ Bohemian resistance to establishing homogenous values and perspectives is exemplified in the confusion in whether whites could be classified as bohemian. While some writers saw the Jewish community as central components of bohemia New York, others, like Hutchins Hapgood, equivocated with the incorporation of the New York Jewish community as part of bohemia.¹⁰⁴ Bohemians thus unsettled whiteness with their heterogeneous sensibility that was alternative to eurocentrism and they flirted the line between "poseurs" who consumed the Other and "true gypsies of the art."¹⁰⁵

Bohemia and Anarchy: The Limitations of Representation and Radicalism

Bohemians used Hartmann to showcase their racial vision as a community, Hartmann saw bohemia as a space to cultivate radicalized political anarchist ideologies, which at times aligned with, and at other times diverged from the greater bohemian community. Through the collusion of art and anarchist ideology at events such as the 1913 International Exhibit of

¹⁰² Levin, *Bohemia in America*, 44.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 337.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 313.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

Modern Art (also known as the Armory Show), which exhibited avant-garde art and evoked a type of aesthetic of anarchist individualism by both European and American artists that was supported by the bohemian community, Hartmann found himself part of the national and global anarchist movement.¹⁰⁶ Hartmann even stood in allegiance with Goldman and other anarchists, for instance, publically demanding the release of Japanese anarchist Denjirō Kōtoku (also known as Shūsui Kōtoku) from the Japanese government.¹⁰⁷ Hartmann contributed to Emma Goldman's anarchist periodical *Mother Earth* and appeared as a guest speaker during some of her lectures.¹⁰⁸ His participation within Emma Goldman's circle highlights his access to various national and international social networks as part of the bohemian community and shows how anarchism was successful through its reliance on its interconnected yet dispersed web of communities and community activists that offered varying levels of engagements with anarchist ideologies.¹⁰⁹

The space of bohemia and its extensive anarchist connections allowed Hartmann to assert a radical political stance while still remaining committed to his art and retaining an artist identity, despite the fact that bohemian political participation held a tenuous relationship with their art.

¹⁰⁶ McFarland, *Inside Greenwich Village* argues that despite the Armory show not technically being considered a Village event, it was a reflection of the bohemian spirit, bohemian players, and was chiefly organized by bohemian artists and promoted and publicized by Villagers like Mabel Dodge. See also Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). Antliff argues that not only was anarchism formative in the development of art and modernism from 1908 to 1920 but art and radical politics were interlinked.

¹⁰⁷ Denjirō Kōtoku was eventually executed in 1911. See untitled article, Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 23, "Scrapbook from 1893-1911."; Kathy E. Ferguson, *Emma Goldman: Political Thinking in the Streets* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011), 237.

¹⁰⁸ *Mother Earth* garnered a circulation rate of upwards of 10,000 readers in 1906. See Ferguson, *Emma Goldman*, 87. Ferguson also notes that Goldman put an estimate that she spoke, during her tours, to 50,000 to 75,000 people per year, 73.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 115. This is what Ferguson describes as anarchist counterpublics.

Bohemians aligned themselves with the interests of the working class, as evident in their artistic contributions to socialist publications within *The Masses* and *The Saturday Press*.¹¹⁰ But their artistry often trumped their political participation and ideologies. In 1916, bohemian artists, disgruntled by editorial captions that politicized their art inappropriately, resulted in an abrupt departure from *The Masses*.¹¹¹ The same year that bohemian artists departed from *The Masses*, Hartmann's article, "Art and Revolt," was published in *The Blast*, an anarchist magazine edited and published by Alexander Berkman. In "Art and Revolt," Hartmann argues that artists are also revolutionaries and describes the lonesome road they both must undertake.¹¹² He sees that artists and revolutionaries both engage in a type of revolt, although he recognizes the former is more likely to be a revolt on the "esthetic limits." Nonetheless, both see "revolt that hates the commonplace, that attacks the unjust, that batters down the dungeon gates of prejudice and arrogance, and tries to make this short span of life saner, more tolerable, more independent and beautiful."¹¹³ Hartmann's words align both artists and revolutionists by the ability to act in the world. Both are capable of making the world better and both are ideologically invested in politics, yet they are expressed using different platforms and means. In contrast to the attempted separation from *The Masses* artists and writers, Hartmann's words establish a firm and undeniable similarity between art and politics, specifically anarchism.¹¹⁴ His article clarifies but

¹¹⁰ Rachel Lynn Schreiber, "Constructive Images: Gender in the Political Cartoons of the *Masses* (1911-1917)" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2008), 22. See also Fishbein and Levin, *Bohemia in America*.

¹¹¹ McFarland, 209.

¹¹² Hartmann, "Art and Revolt," *The Blast*, ed. Alexander Berkman (Dec. 1916), Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, Collection 068, box 19.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, 1. Anarchism in this context, according to Antliff, can be defined as opposition to "any ensemble of cultural beliefs and practices that oppressed the individual. Anarchism, therefore, nurtured a revolt against the norms and institutions through

also attempts to legitimize bohemian's political participation as anarchists and establishes the type of activism and alliances that could exist between anarchists and bohemian artists.

Similarly, anarchists were enthusiastic in broadening their demographic base and building alliances and bohemia offered an already radicalized population that could inflect intellectual and innovative strategies into the cause.¹¹⁵ However, Hartmann's politicized writings were also quick to acknowledge the limitations of bohemian anarchists. In homage to anarchist Voltairine de Cleyre that appeared in *Mother Earth* (1915) Hartmann both praises her life but does not sugarcoat his less positive feelings of her. Hartmann explains, "she [Voltairine de Cleyre] apparently never forgave me for borrowing two dollars from her. Very likely, she had worked hard for it, and I needed it merely for the entertainment of some 'beer' comrades and had forgotten all about it a few hours later. Voltairine was sorely deficient in humor, and she had no use for parlor, studio, or saloon anarchism."¹¹⁶ Hartmann's explanation is indicative of his writing style, which has stinging honesty and sometimes mean humor. Yet his use of the politicized term of comrade only to describe their affinity toward drinking beer together is coupled with the recognition that his activism is severely limited and extends only as far as the saloon. Hartmann's depiction of his bohemian lifestyle in comparison to Voltairine's anarchism plays up the stereotypical images of apathetic bohemian loafers.¹¹⁷ In his article, Hartmann juxtaposes his bohemian impoverished shenanigans and beer drinking desires to Voltairine as

which dominant forces in capitalist America sought to contain and channel social activity, including art," 2.

¹¹⁵ Andrew Cornell, "'For a World Without Oppressors': U.S. Anarchism from the Palmer Raids to the Sixties" (Ph.D. diss. New York University, 2011), 87.

¹¹⁶ Sadakichi Hartmann, "Voltairine De Cleyre," *Mother Earth*.10.2 (April 1915), HathiTrust Digital Library, <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015014188802;view=2up;seq=78>, accessed Dec. 28, 2017.

¹¹⁷ "Bohemia in New-York." *New York Times* (Jan. 6, 1858).

humorless but also comments on her bravery and indefatigable work and commitment. While Hartmann is humorously disparaging of bohemian attitudes, his article also reveals the potential for jovial revolutionary spirits between groups and show that conversations, connections, and alliances were successful in being formed over beers and within saloons.¹¹⁸ This had the potential to create a mutually desired new identity, the bohemian anarchist. Yet this identity was ostensibly disconnected from race. In fact, none of Hartmann's work within anarchist circles seems to have addressed the issues of race or his Eurasian identity.¹¹⁹

As someone who continually produced various racialized identities throughout his life, the absence of explicit discussions of race from Hartmann's work can be read as a purposeful and intentional attempt to construct anarchism as an unmarked racial political space.

Demographically, anarchists in the early twentieth century were mostly Russian, Jewish, and Italian immigrants and were “inbetween people” on the racial classification system—unevenly and insecurely situated between white and nonwhite.”¹²⁰ However, policy makers, authorities, and journalists not only positioned anarchism as a foreign political ideology, they also ascribed racialized traits to anarchists. These discursive strategies functioned to show anarchists as un-American and thus stripped of the “racial properties of whiteness,” despite the large number of white and European males that participated in anarchism and which were classified as white at other instances.¹²¹ Anarchists were depicted as savages, a stereotype that usually applied to

¹¹⁸ Ferguson, *Emma Goldman*, 84.

¹¹⁹ He also spoke significantly on bohemian ideologies that were supported by anarchists, like concepts of free love.

¹²⁰ Cornell, “For a World Without Oppressors,” 31. See also Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness* who argues that Europeans were “inbetween people” or people who occupied the space between “hard racism and full inclusion—neither securely white nor nonwhite” but were able, albeit unevenly, to claim rights that were associated and privy to whites, 12.

¹²¹ Basson, *White Enough to Be American?*, 143.

American Indians, and the press often compared them to the threat of invasion of “Chinamen.”¹²² Racializing anarchists made it less likely to see the reality that anarchists constituted an invisible population that was indistinguishable from other European groups that were considered white. According to Basson, anarchists posed a threat that was similar to mixed race individuals whose ambiguity made it so that they could pass for white.¹²³ Positioned as an invisible population, both mixed race people and anarchists could infiltrate and challenge the existing social orders within the United States. Empowered by their ability to be disguised, these insidious racial or political interlopers needed to be recognized.

The press often conflated Hartmann’s Japanese ancestry and anarchism in an effort to racialize, ridicule, and dismiss anarchist claims for legitimization. As early as 1894, Hartmann, while lecturing with Emma Goldman, is described in a pithy article published in *The Weekly World*. To be exact, it is not Hartmann’s words that get attention but his hair. Hartmann is described as having “a strain of Japanese blood in his veins and that gives him rather the advantage of his fellow anarchists in the matter of making a figurative uproar with his hair. If the other heads present suggested the explosion of hair bombs, Mr. Sadarichi [sic] Hartmann’s was a miniature reproduction of the blowing up of a hair-stuffed Hell Gate. It filled one entire corner of the room and overshadowed every other head of hair there.”¹²⁴ Although the article explicitly mentions the planned bombing for Hell Gate in 1885, which spectacularly cleared the underwater reef and rocks for safe boat navigation into the New York harbor, the hair bombs inevitably also evoke the anarchist terrorism that included the infamous Haymarket Square bombings in

¹²² Basson, *White Enough to Be American?*, 151. Ferguson, *Emma Goldman*, 189. Ferguson describes the many instances they were collectively represented as savage, insane, and diseased.

¹²³ Basson, *White Enough to Be American?*, 151.

¹²⁴ *The Weekly World* (1894), Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 23, “Scrapbook 1893 to 1911.”

Chicago in 1886 and which was still on the public's mind. The attention to Hartmann's "Japanese" hair also distracts from the intention of the meeting and his role as a lecturer. Instead, it caricatures Hartmann and divorces his intellectual capabilities from his racialized head of hair since there is little mention of the actual content of Hartmann's speech. In this example, Hartmann's hair signifies the anarchist violence of bomb throwing and shows that anarchists and Eurasians could be easily identifiable racially, in this case through Hartmann's "Japanese" hair. Although Goldman was not the subject to the same physical scrutiny in *The Weekly World* article, Ferguson describes the press' obsession with Goldman's appearance: her neat and fashionable attire, cleanliness, and petite frame was often depicted as surprising since it countered the typical stereotypes of Jewish immigrants as dirty and women orators as unfeminine.¹²⁵ The press inscribed these pervasive racial stereotypes onto the bodies of anarchist lecturers, racializing its members in ways that belittled the goals of anarchism. Hartmann's hair functioned as one method to expose him as both Eurasian and anarchist and shows the ways in which the press racialized his radicalism. It also shows the limitations of Hartmann's productions of identities. Hartmann did not connect his anarchist identity with his Eurasian identity, yet a racialized identity was externally imposed by the press and shows Hartmann's inability to assert complete control over his image.

Hartmann's production of various identities also raises the question of why he did not attempt to construct a white identity in order to circumvent the negative racialized depictions that were used as fodder to delegitimize anarchist claims. While the use of the pen name Sidney Allan would have likely been problematic in anarchist circles, since it was based upon a more upper-class identity, Hartmann made no effort to create or remake a new identity that signified

¹²⁵ Ferguson, *Emma Goldman*, 76.

his anarchist ideologies. Marking or acknowledging anarchism as a white political space was also not a goal or central endeavor for anarchists primarily because “anarchism has always had a hard time dealing with race.”¹²⁶ Anarchists saw race not as a system of intersectional oppression but as a byproduct of capitalism. United States anarchists’ inattention to race did not mean they completely denied or ignored racial oppression.¹²⁷ Rather, they did not pay careful attention to the ways that white supremacy impacted their lived experiences and did not see race as a vehicle that was central in shaping the United States. Moreover, at times anarchists reproduced racist ideals, including the belief of empty land and erasure of indigenous peoples as well as the articulation of white wage-labor as more enchained than black slaves.¹²⁸ Anarchism was hindered by its lack of attention to race politics and racism that was reinforced through the silences of people like Hartmann. Ironically, by not calling attention to race, anarchists were then made more vulnerable by the mainstream press’s vehement racialization that supported the stripping of their white privilege if they were considered too politically radical and un-American.¹²⁹ If, for Hartmann, calling attention to race came at the expense of a type of self-

¹²⁶ Joel Olson, “The Problem with Infoshops and insurrection: US anarchism, movement building, and the racial order,” in *Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy*, eds. Randall Amster, et al. (New York, Routledge, 2009). See also Ferguson, *Emma Goldman*, chapter 5.

¹²⁷ Cornell, ““For a World Without Oppressors”” is helpful here in contrasting United States anarchists who paid little attention to race in comparison to Italian anarchist and Spanish speaking anarchists who took an active role in combating the structural oppressions of race, 70-71.

¹²⁸ Basson, *White Enough to Be American?*, chapter 4.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 143. Cornell, ““For a World Without Oppressors,”” 72. Cornell’s chapter 1 includes an extensive breakdown of the various laws that worked to exclude, deport, and prosecute anarchists. These laws included the 1903 Immigration Act, the 1907 Espionage Act, the 1917-1918 immigration legislation that effectively banned anarchist immigrants from entering into the United States as well as the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act which curbed European immigrants, to a proposed (but never passed) bill in 1919 that suggested that anarchist be sent to a created penal colony on an island in the Philippines, 122.

Orientalism but was recoverable through a self-tropicalizing parody, inattention to race illuminates the individual and collective social consequences of an externally imposed racialized identity. It also shows that although Hartmann was attuned to the politics of race, his claim that his activism only extended as far as the beer rooms makes it seem likely that anarchism was not the most compelling aspect of his identity or a main driving force in his life.¹³⁰ On a larger level, it shows how anarchism did not have adequate tools to deal with race.

The imposition of a racialized identity also occurred in association with Hartmann's bohemian identity. While Hartmann's long hair signified bomb-throwing anarchist affiliation to some, to others Hartmann's long hair represented his bohemian ties and enabled the mainstream press to further delegitimize his masculinity through a racializing of his physical appearance. For bohemian men, mainstream representations of their masculinity were constantly questioned and doubted.¹³¹ Their feminization was attributed by their long hair and exacerbated by their interest in art, which was deemed to be particularly feminine and soft in comparison to their male counterparts in business or science.¹³² Hartmann's feminization, however, cannot be simply classified as a mode of disempowerment, particularly when viewed within the context of bohemian. While mainstream presses associated feminine qualities and flamboyancy as a problem, within bohemian, some white male artists embraced that association as one component of their artistry. Some bohemians believed that true bohemian artists could simultaneously demonstrate masculine qualities such as logic, hard work, and knowledge alongside a feminine

¹³⁰ This is reinforced in Bonham's diary where she notes Hartmann's critical comments on anarchism. Lilian Bonham Diary, Sadakichi Hartmann papers, collection 068, box 42 and 43.

¹³¹ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, chapter 9. Chauncey notes that the Village's "reputation for tolerating nonconformity (or 'eccentricity') and the impetus for social experimentation" made it a safer place for homosexuals. They fit in with other flamboyant figures, even those not coded as gay, 229. See also Heap, *Slumming*, 163.

¹³² Stansell, *American Moderns*, 32.

childlike attitude and romantic spirit. This enabled “all would-be Bohemians to return to childhood and feminine identifications with impunity.”¹³³ Therefore, Hartmann’s feminization could have also been interpreted as a desirable quality within bohemia.

Yet, unlike other bohemian characters, Hartmann’s feminization is also a result of his ethnic identity and stigmatized within the bohemian community itself. For instance, in one column from *Bruno’s Weekly*, Hartmann is identified throughout the column by his first name only, Sadakichi, and is depicted as a “true” and “wonderful” bohemian who reads Poe’s works and dances whimsically and poetically. In an effort for firm and delineated classifications, the author is compelled to attach all of Hartmann’s attributes to his various ethnic backgrounds. The author states, “his rambling talk has a German transcendental twist to it, but his language suggests the flowerly kingdom: there is a daintiness of expression and a light exuberance which is not at all German, nor is it French. It is Jap. I should like to see and hear more of Sadakechi [sic].”¹³⁴ In this example, Hartmann’s Japanese qualities are conveyed through the use of the words “daintiness” and “flowerly.” This feminine language is associated directly with Hartmann’s Japanese background. Although it is in an effort to praise Hartmann, he is described as having feminine qualities. These qualities reflected dominant perceptions of Asian men, who were also positioned as feminine and which correlated to their regulation to feminized labor roles.¹³⁵

¹³³ Levin, *Bohemia in America*, 216.

¹³⁴ *Bruno’s Weekly*, (circa 1893-1911) Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 23, “Scrapbook 1893 to 1911.”

¹³⁵ For westerners, the Chinese queue evoked an inability to assimilate, feminine long hair, and “unruly sexuality.” See Ross G. Forman, *China and the Victorian Imagination: Empires Entwined* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013).

The historic denial of citizenship to Asian men, exploitation of their labor and limited job choices, which led to a concentration of Asian immigrants to take jobs in “feminized” professions helped to connect masculinity to white men.¹³⁶ In contrast, it is Hartmann’s speech that gets pegged as German and “transcendental” and thus the West is credited with, and empowered by, Hartmann’s philosophy and intellect. More importantly, the article shows the Eurasian Hartmann as an anomaly and contradiction of sorts—he was repeatedly deemed by the press as both “fascinating and repelling,” “exotic and American,” “foreign” and yet “weirdly harmonious.”¹³⁷ As a fluid and untethered signifier, Hartmann used his Eurasian identity to gain professional success as a lecturer and proclaimed Orientalist scholar. Yet it also had the effect of being taken up by the mainstream and bohemian press in an effort to delegitimize his anarchism and masculinity.

Conclusion

By the late 1920s, Floyd Dell asserted that Greenwich Village was no longer bohemia, as the skyrocketing rents precluded the very starving and aspiring artists who once comprised bohemian culture.¹³⁸ By that time, Hartmann had also, like many bohemians, left New York although he returned quite frequently for extended visits. In pursuit of both money and in the attempt to alleviate his troubling asthma, Hartmann moved to California. After a brief stint working with the Bohemian club in the Bay Area and coastal living in Montera, he eventually settled in Banning, California. His associations with benefactors to support his lifestyle

¹³⁶ David L. Eng, *Racial Castration Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham: Duke UP, 2001).

¹³⁷ See Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 24, “Atma D. Hartmann-Gilliland’s Scrapbook.”

¹³⁸ Levin, *Bohemia in America*, 385.

continued as he hobnobbed with people like John Decker, Drew Barrymore, and Gene Fowler, who eventually wrote a book *Minutes of the Last Meeting* (1954) highlighting the antics of the aging Hartmann, including the questioning of Hartmann's friends, family, and almost internment during WWII.¹³⁹ This time, Hartmann, in yet another manipulation of his ethnic identity, proclaimed that although he was born in Japan, his mother could have been Korean.¹⁴⁰ Thereby, at least according to Hartmann's logic, he would be ineligible for internment. It is unknown if this was the compelling reason that prevented Hartmann's internment, or if, as the other investigations concluded, he was crippled by ill health and was an unthreatening invalid.¹⁴¹ Hartmann was not interned but his claim to a partial Korean ancestry in the wake of Japanese internment signals, yet again, his continued desire to utilize racialized identities as tools that could be harnessed advantageously. His attempt for another malleable identity was initiated by the visual anxiety of Japanese bodies in the wake of WWII and the violence and denial of protections under United States law. The homogenizing of Asians as Japanese created a concerted effort by other Asian groups, such as Chinese and Koreans, to ethnically identify and differentiate themselves from the Japanese population.¹⁴² Newspapers and media also attempted to "educate" the public in the discernment between Chinese and Japanese, in both appearance and demeanor.¹⁴³ Hartmann's new claim as part Korean undermines these visual markers of race by calling into question the reliability of these biological measurements since Hartmann as part

¹³⁹ Gene Fowler, *Minutes of the Last Meeting* (New York: Viking, 1954).

¹⁴⁰ In his autobiography, written later in life, Hartmann does not mention his mother's identity as Korean. It seems, given the circumstance, this arose only during the FBI's inquiry for internment. See Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 29, "1942."

¹⁴¹ In either case, the FBI report concluded, "there is no indication of un-Americanism or subversive activity on the part of the subject." "S.H. FBI Report, 1943," Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 29.

¹⁴² Creef, *Imaging Japanese America*, 147.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 148.

Korean would mean that he was improperly read as white, Japanese, and Japanese-German Eurasian at previous points in his life. It again points out Hartmann's belief that race is not immutable and shows that Hartmann believed race could not be phenotypically read as a way to index a person's political allegiance or status as enemy or friend. Moreover, the fact that Hartmann attempted to claim a Korean ancestry shows his genuine fear of the possibility of internment as a person of mixed race descent.¹⁴⁴ During WWII, Japanese mixed race citizens were unevenly interned and interracial families who had a Japanese father were considered less able to assimilate and were more likely to face internment.¹⁴⁵ In any case, Hartmann's racial performance as part Korean was a strategy to circumvent the racist government policies that were being implemented. Hartmann continued a life of abject poverty in Banning until his death in 1944 and in this way, Hartmann did live a bohemian lifestyle, driven by his artistic and intellectual pursuits rather than by money. Throughout his lifetime, Hartmann understood and enacted, parodied, and performed race, blurring the choice between racial deception and racial authenticity and which was evident in the *Riverside Enterprise's* newspaper article title ten years after Hartmann's death that asked the question, "Sadakichi Hartmann—Genius? or Charlatan?"¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ See Ho, *Racial Ambiguity in Asian American Culture* whose chapter 1 addresses Japanese internment and its mixed-marriage policy.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁴⁶ Harry Lawton, "The Last Bohemian: Sadakichi Hartmann—Genius? or Charlatan?" in *Riverside Enterprise* (August 4, 1954), Sadakichi Hartmann Papers, collection 068, box 36, folder "Lawton."

Chapter 2

Domesticity and the Science of Mixed Race in the Writing of Winnifred Eaton

“I was, if you like, a mongrel [...] When I read articles or stories by famous authors who say that people of my mixture of blood are degenerate or anyway of low caliber [sic], I wonder!” – Winnifred Eaton.¹

Found in her private correspondence, writer Winnifred Eaton’s reflections above mark her personal and public ambivalence about racial mixing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and illustrate the common perceptions of her peers who used the idea of degeneracy to scientifically justify revulsion against interracial sex, marriage, and intimacy. At the height of Eaton’s writing career, the debate raged regarding how to classify those of mixed race descent, such as Eurasians. Some scientists acknowledged that crossbreeding could produce positive offspring in plants and animals but few extended this to an endorsement of interracial marriage between whites and Asians.² Others saw Eurasians as clear indications of inferiority and degeneracy. Eaton identifies herself as belonging to this “mongrel” class but her personal exclamation of wonder is opaque and indirect. Eaton’s opinions on how to view Eurasians can instead be more clearly found in her publications and writings in home and family magazines, where she promoted Eurasians as desirable and ideal.

Magazines that focused on the various aspects of the home (e.g. cooking, gardens, and entertaining) were considered “feminized spaces” that were defined against the masculine political world drew a large women’s readership, and enabled women writers, like Eaton, to have

¹ Winnifred Eaton Reeve (Onoto Watanna), “You Can’t Run Away From Yourself.” Circa 1920s. Winnifred Eaton Papers, Collection 299/82.13, box 3. Taylor Family Digital Library, University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada. Hereafter, cited as Winnifred Eaton Papers.

² Cathy Boeckmann, *A Question of Character: Scientific Racism and the Genres of American Fiction, 1892-1912* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2000), 31.

a powerful venue in which to engage in politics and write about social issues.³ Many women who published in these “women’s magazines” can be considered domestic advisors. Domestic advisors were women writers whose topics explored the homes and the science of the domestic space as a unique means to enter into the public sphere and establish their roles as social commentators.⁴ As Sarah A. Leavitt has established, dating back to the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, there were many female domestic advisors even before the preeminent Martha Stewart.⁵ Their work catered to a growing class of literate white middle-class women who had an interest in the science of the home.

I place Eaton in the lineage of domestic advisors to argue that Eaton took advantage of women’s interest in science of the home to further advance her ideas of race and racial mixing. More specifically, she used “objective” discourses of science and eugenics to promote a positive Eurasian identity through women’s magazines. However, Eaton’s writings were not simply a promotion of Eurasians and racial mixing but often, her ideas were buttressed with stereotypes of the Orient. Since a mixed race identity was already a central component in her fiction writing, which enabled her to claim a type of expertise of all things Japanese, it likely made it possible for her to cross into the genre of women’s magazines, particularly because both had a readership of predominantly white middle-class women. The authorial influence she garnered from her fiction work was extended into domestic topics, like gardening, that merged Japanese and

³ Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?: Domesticity and Desire in the Woman’s Magazine, 1800-1914* (London: Routledge, 1996), 3.

⁴ Sarah A. Leavitt, *From Catherine Beecher to Martha Stewart: A Cultural History of Domestic Advice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 5. Leavitt defines domestic advisors as social commentators that used manuals and magazine articles to instruct Americans on domestic issues like the home, furniture, etc. This advice did not, however, reflect the cultural realities but demonstrated cultural desires and ideals.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

western aesthetics. Eaton also couched her views on race and racial mixing in her discussions of cooking, cleaning, and gardening while intertwining love stories. These were topics that were seen as popular and compelling for white middle-class readers. In other words, Eaton strategically ensured both a type of affiliation and relatability as well as a hint of exciting difference and Otherness that allowed her to claim expert status as a domestic advisor.

As the first writer of Asian descent to publish a novel in the United States, Winnifred Eaton boasts an impressive publication of books, short stories, and essays beyond her writing in women's magazines. Her life has typically been framed through the controversial self-promotion of her pen name Onoto Watanna. Born to a Chinese mother and an English father in Montreal, Canada in 1875, Eaton unusual pseudonym—Onoto Watanna—has inspired scholarly debate. Amy Ling explains that Eaton's adoption of a fictive Japanese identity, as opposed to her real Chinese Eurasian identity, was a means to circumvent the racism and nativism against Chinese immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century.⁶ The Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 had prevented most Chinese immigrants from entering the United States or from becoming naturalized citizens.⁷ Moreover, by using the name Onoto Watanna, she could also carve a persona that was ethnically different from her older sister, Edith Maude Eaton, who had taken the mixed race Chinese identity and pen name Sui Sin Far.⁸ Edith had started publishing articles in the 1880s, ten years prior to Winnifred's entrance into publishing. However, Winnifred went on to publish more than her older sister—nine novels by major publishing houses, beginning with her first, *Miss Numè of Japan* (1898). Winnifred's most famous novel, *A Japanese*

⁶ Ling, *Between Worlds*.

⁷ Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 2.

⁸ Annette White-Parks, *Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude Eaton: A Literary Biography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 1.

Nightingale, sold thousands of copies and was converted into a Broadway play.⁹ In 1991, Edith's work was revived with the publication of *The Big Aiiieeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers* which framed Edith as authentic because her writing correlated to her "real" ethnic identity.¹⁰ In contrast, Winnifred's work was absent in the seminal anthology and in early Asian American literary critique. Some scholars were troubled by Winnifred's stereotypical treatment of Japan and derided her for lying about her ethnic background and conceding to popular demand in order to sell stories.¹¹ Later scholars analyzed her writing as covertly subversive and labeled her a "trickster" figure, which has contributed to her more positive reception of her work and its recent rise in popularity within academic scholarship.¹²

⁹ 200,000 copies according to Winnifred Eaton. See Diana Birchall, *Onoto Watanna: The Story of Winnifred Eaton* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 75.

¹⁰ Frank Chin, "Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake." In *The Big Aiiieeee!: An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature*, eds. Jeffrey Paul Chan, et al. (New York: Meridian, 1991), 12. The biggest debate over the authenticity of Asian American writers and writing occurred between Maxine Hong Kingston and Frank Chin. According to Ann Anlin Cheng, this gendered "pen" war problematically reinforced a binary of "us" versus "them" within the field of Asian American literary scholarship. See Ann Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (New York: Oxford UP, 2001), 194.

¹¹ Xiao-Huang Yin, "'Between the East and West,' Sui Sin Far—The First Chinese American Woman Writer," *Arizona Quarterly* 7 (Winter 1991), 54.

¹² See Ling *Between Worlds*, Matsukawa "Cross-Dressing and Cross-Naming." For more recent scholarship on Winnifred Eaton see Yuko Matsukawa, "Cross-Dressing and Cross-Naming: Decoding Onoto Watanna," in *Tricksterism in Turn-of-the-Century American Literature*, ed., Elizabeth Ammons and Annette White-Parks (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994); Eve Oishi, "'High-Class Fakery': Race, Sex and Class in the Screenwriting of Winnifred Eaton (1925-1931)," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 23.1 (2006); Dominika Ferens, *Edith and Winnifred Eaton: Chinatown Missions and Japanese Romances*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Jean Lee Cole, *The Literary Voices of Winnifred Eaton: Redefining Ethnicity and Authenticity* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 2002); Jolie A. Sheffer, *The Romance of Race: Incest, Miscegenation, and Multiculturalism in the United States 1880-1930* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2013). Because significant scholarship engages with Eaton's identity as a mixed race Chinese woman performing as mixed race Japanese, this chapter does not address or analyze the performance of her ethnic identity but rather uses her proclaimed mixed race identity as a springboard to engage in the broader discourses of mixed race.

My interest in Winnifred, as opposed to her sister Edith, stems from the fact that Winnifred clearly used her proclaimed Japanese mixed race identity to her career advantage. Like Sadakichi Hartmann, Winnifred capitalized on the growing attention and rising popularity of Japanese culture, objects, and art on the east coast amongst the upper-class. She gained fame because of the public's inability to differentiate between Chinese and Japanese accurately. Furthermore, her Japanese-themed novels perfectly fit with the growing obsession with Japanese culture and material objects.¹³ Almost always set in Japan, Eaton's early novels seemed to confirm prevalent perceptions and stereotypes of Japan. For instance, Eaton's Japanese characters typically spoke Pidgin English and the love stories revolved around American men and Japanese women. Many of her novels even had geisha girls and samurai.¹⁴

Alongside the lure of her Japanese-themed novels and mixed race characters, Eaton's gender and proclaimed Japanese mixed race identity was also a large selling point for readers, making her books extremely popular. Scholars have shown the ways in which Eaton's public articulation of a mixed race identity, albeit ethnically inaccurate, played a considerable role in cultivating the public's knowledge of Japanese Eurasians and was centrally responsible for her career success. Dominika Ferens has suggested that Eaton's mixed race Japanese performance was particularly important because it "afforded her a degree of exceptionality she would not have had as a white woman."¹⁵

¹³ Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium*; Yoshihara, *Embracing the East*.

¹⁴ Sheffer, *The Romance of Race*, 58. However, it is notable that many scholars have analyzed the subtle ways that Eaton challenged these stereotypes, even in his fiction. For instance, Moser argues that Eaton never constructed the Japanese female protagonists as passive victims. Moreover, unlike the tragic Eurasian figure, many of the protagonists successfully engaged in an interracial relationship or marriage by the close of the story. See Linda Trinh Moser Trinh, "Introduction," in *A Half Caste and Other Writings, Onoto Watanna*, eds., Linda Trinh Moser and Elizabeth Rooney (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), xiv.

¹⁵ Ferens, *Edith and Winnifred Eaton*, 118.

Alongside Eaton's Japanese fiction novels were her writings in women's magazines, which is an understudied portion of Eaton's works and which significantly shows the ways in which women's magazines was an important venue for women to learn about the science that pertained to them (the science of the home). Women's magazines also deployed and engaged in larger public discourses on eugenics. Eaton published in any venue in which she could earn an income and this included women's magazines. For instance, just one year after publishing *Miss Numè of Japan* (1898), she published in *Ladies Home Journal* and continued writing in women's magazines until 1914. Her last major article publication in women's magazines was "A Chinese-Japanese Cookbook" (1914) that she co-wrote with her sister, Sara Bosse.¹⁶ Shortly thereafter, Eaton divorced her first husband (Bertrand Babcock), married her second husband (Francis Reeve), and moved to Calgary, Canada.¹⁷ She shifted her attention to depictions of cattle ranching in Calgary. Yet her continued engagement in women's domesticity in the United States even after her move to Calgary reflects her perceptions of the United States and showcases her position as Eurasian mother, wife, and writer on the east coast in ways that her fiction novels tend to elide. Eaton's novels focused on fictional characters engaged in interracial romances. In contrast, her magazines articles tended to highlight the scientific ways that home gets created, post-romance. By evoking the language of eugenics, Eaton did more than just advocate for racial mixing and a positive perception of Eurasians. In contrast to Sadakichi Hartmann, whose bohemianism and anarchist identity showcased an improper subjectivity, Eaton positioned

¹⁶ In contrast to Winnifred and Edith, there is no evidence that the other sisters wrote or published. Sarah Bosse married French German, Karl Bosse who had a medical degree but became a medical illustrator. The two settled in New York and Sarah Bosse likely did not write "ethnically" like her sisters. See White-Parks, *Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude*, 57.

¹⁷ While she was living in Calgary, Eaton was helping her husband with his cattle business while also publishing in Canadian magazines and newspapers.

herself as a “proper” woman through her prescriptions of scientific approaches to the domestic space of the home. She also asserted her authority to simultaneously showcase a similarity to, and difference from, her white female readers—strategically marking and unmarking her writing in order to evoke interest and deliberately crafting her own mixed race identity through the role of domestic advisor and through the language of science within women’s magazines.

Changing the Hearts and Minds of White Middle Class Suburban Women through Flowers and Gardens

Eaton’s popularity was high amongst white, middle-class women who relished her novels for their Japanese storylines and pleasing visual drawings of flowers and nature that accompanied the narrative. Eaton’s novels, *A Japanese Nightingale* (1901), *The Wooing of Wisteria* (1902), *The Heart of Hyacinth* (1903), *The Love of Azalea* (1904), and *A Japanese Blossom* (1906) thematically showcased flowers in book titles and character names and also featured them as ornamental components within the interior pages of the novels. Reviewers commented with delight that the images enhanced their reading experience. One review of *The Love of Azalea* noted:

The illustration and decorations are by Gazo Foudji, a Japanese artist, and are designed according to Japanese notions. The result is effective, but presents a suggestive mingling of Oriental and occidental ideas with regard to art. The pages bear in tint a floral design, which runs through the border and under the text. The general effect is a graceful and dainty volume, which will appeal to the lover of bric-a-brac in books.¹⁸

¹⁸ “A Japanese Romance,” *Eagle*, Brooklyn, NY (Dec. 10, 1904), Winnifred Eaton Papers, collection 299/82.13, box 19.

Despite having a Japanese artist and illustrations deemed in keeping with “Japanese notions,” readers saw Eaton’s text as a fusion of Japanese and European cultures. The reviewer’s use of the word “but” suggests that this fusion is appealing yet not truly Japanese art. This mingling was more accessible to a western audience precisely because of Eaton’s mixed race background. Another review in the *Washington Life* reported that Eaton’s inherently Japanese poetic thought “is not so marked in this and other books by the same author as it is in the work of the poet Yone Noguchi, and is therefore more understandable and pleasing to American readers.”¹⁹ For the reviewer, American readers signified someone that was not Japanese, and likely interpreted as white. The comparison between Japanese poet Noguchi marks them both as contemporaries on the east coast. Yet in comparison to Noguchi, Eaton’s writing produced an understanding of what was Japanese through the mediation of her partial white identity that enabled a familiar foreignness. Eaton’s work as more “understandable” and “pleasing” was likely read by critics as connected to her mixed race identity and helped to translate “exotic” Japanese content for white audiences.

Novels like Eaton’s, with their floral decorative covers, were showcased in middle and upper-class homes and were one key component of women’s entertaining. Eaton’s exotically feminine books catered to the popularity of Oriental consumer goods for white upper and middle-class women. Her novels followed the advice in women’s magazines that advocated for international fashion, foods, and parties and enabled women to participate in empire building through the consumption of these Oriental material goods.²⁰ For instance, in an advice article that detailed how to “make a Japanese fete suitable for a Fourth of July affair,” Eaton suggests that

¹⁹ “The Heart of Hyacinth,” *Washington Life*, Washington D.C. (Dec. 26, 1903), Winnifred Eaton Papers, collection 299/82.13, box 19.

²⁰ Hoganson, *Consumer’s Imperium*, 9.

along with lanterns, fans, and Japanese “costumes,” a hostess should “take into consideration of Japanese love for flowers” and which include cherry blossoms, wisteria, pond lilies, and water lilies.²¹ The article then recommends complementing the floral arrangements with the reading of “Madame Butterfly” or Eaton’s “The Japanese Nightingale.” However, if this is “too” Japanese, the article recommends hanging American flags or making decorations “indicative of the Philippines, Cuba and Alaska.”²² The embrace of cultural decorations, ethnic attire, and international cuisine within domestic spaces enabled white middle-class housewives to “experience empire secondhand.”²³ Eaton’s work was clearly part of these expressions for white middle-class women. The ornate decorations allowed her work to be visually displayed inside and her Orientalist themes enabled her work to be, as the article details, read aloud to help produce an air of Japan in the home.

The article also helpfully points toward the appropriateness of particular material goods for women, including floral arrangements. The aesthetics of flowers connoted a type of femininity for these women readers. Beyond just ornaments to beautify books, flowers were perceived as a necessity in order to create a refined and luxurious home.²⁴ British botanist Frederick William Burbidge wrote in 1874 that “as a nation attains to a higher state of social refinement, civilization, and good taste, so does this universal love for beautiful flowers increase.”²⁵ For white upper-class women, appreciation of flowers, gardens, and nature was an

²¹ Untitled Article, Chicago, IL (July 1904), Winnifred Eaton Papers, collection 299/82.13, box 19.

²² Ibid.

²³ Hoganson, *Consumer’s Imperium*, 8-9.

²⁴ Frederick William Burbidge, “Domestic Floriculture, Window-gardening and Floral Decorations: Being Practical Directions for the Propagation, Culture, and Arrangement of Plants and Flowers as Domestic Ornaments” (1874), HathiTrust Digital Library, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044026495333>, accessed Dec. 27, 2017.

²⁵ Ibid., 2-3.

appropriate extension of women's domesticity.²⁶ Women were positioned as "caretakers" of plants and flowers and were encouraged to garden as a form of exercise and health.²⁷ It was also one avenue of acceptable scholarly pursuit. Schools and departments specializing in landscape architecture became open to women, who could become "experts" in this field.²⁸

Eaton's emphasis on plants and flowers went beyond the images in her novels. Instead, gardens were configured as another domestic space in which women could consume the Orient, just like the inside of their homes. For instance, "A Neighbor's Garden, My Own, and a Dream One" (1908) showcased an amalgamation of exotic Oriental plants that could peacefully comeingle with native plants. Published in *Good Housekeeping*, a magazine geared toward middle-class homemaking, the unnamed protagonist, whom scholars have identified as Eaton, moves to the New York suburbs.²⁹ Recognizing that she does not have the money to hire someone to produce a ready-made garden, Eaton is inspired to do it herself when she hears her neighbor, Mrs. C say that she had easily planted her garden. The arduous undertaking proves to be a failure: Eaton painstakingly breaks the hard soil only to forget to fertilize before planting the seeds. As the plants grow, Eaton misidentifies the weeds and pulls all of the growing flowers instead. Admitting failure to her neighbor, Mrs. C reveals that while she technically planted the garden alone, she had hired help to rototill and weed. Eaton then decides that she will sacrifice the newest fashion for her children in order to afford hired help for her garden next season. After

²⁶ Vera Norwood, *Made from this Earth: American Women and Nature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁹ Nancy A. Walker, *Shaping Our Mothers' World: American Women's Magazines* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000). See also Ferens, *Edith and Winnifred Eaton*; Cole, *The Literary Voices of Winnifred Eaton*; Birchall, *Onoto Watanna* who all demonstrate the ways in which Eaton can be seen to embody the protagonist in this piece.

Eaton's blunder, she uses the remainder of the article to imagine her dream garden. In this dream garden, Eaton painstakingly describes each variety of flower as they interact and come together in this idealized landscape. Scholars have interpreted this story as a "do-it-yourself" article for aspiring women gardeners through which white women participated, including the invisible labor of a gardener and the fact that most women readers of these magazines were, in reality, *not* doing hard physical labor.³⁰

Eaton's story also illustrates the perceived priorities for women in the suburbs: gardening, family, and fashion. Dominika Ferens explains that the garden narrative was well-suited thematically for a woman's magazine and its publication in April, the beginning of gardening season, was well-timed.³¹ She reads the story as a way for Eaton to showcase both her similarity to white suburban women and her racial difference that which provided intrigue and popularity. In Ferens' words, Japanese descent gave Eaton "license to interpret the Japanese aesthetic."³² However, Ferens observes that the racialized language in Eaton's dream "Eden" garden can be read as a racial allegory.³³ For instance, Eaton writes, "I know a long, narrow bed of yellow coreopsis. When the wind blows ever so faintly those small gorgeous flowers look like an Oriental army marching with flying colors."³⁴ Ferens reads the flowers that Eaton meticulously describes as a metaphor for the races, with Eaton ultimately advocating for a separation of the strong Oriental coreopsis and the Caucasian "brazen poppies."³⁵ Ferens argues

³⁰ Cole, *The Literary Voices of Winnifred Eaton*, 71.

³¹ Ferens, *Edith and Winnifred Eaton*, 125.

³² *Ibid.*, 127.

³³ *Ibid.*, 127.

³⁴ Onoto Watanna, "A Neighbor's Garden, My Own and a Dream One," in *A Half Caste and Other Writings*, eds. Linda Trinh Moser and Elizabeth Rooney (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 120.

³⁵ Ferens, *Edith and Winnifred Eaton*, 128.

that Eaton's descriptions of the two types of flowers showcase Occidentals as being "less clean" and "less strong" while highlighting the Orient as superior.³⁶ In reading the actions that Eaton takes with the two varieties, Ferens explains, "in response to the rhetoric of Asian exclusion, she creates a realm where there is no exclusion—though there is segregation."³⁷ Yet while Eaton does describe the "Oriental" coreopsis, she never mentions the race of the "brazen poppies" and the analogy to the Caucasian race can only be inferred at best.

By contrast, I read "A Neighbor's Garden" as a how-to guide in which Eaton capitalized on her mixed race identity by claiming expertise on *how* to combine Japanese and western plants and aesthetics within this feminine extension of the domestic realm—the garden. In her dream garden, Eaton's Japanese plants are described as essential components that add beauty to the garden. She proposes the "wonderful wisteria of Japan" that droop above a pond because "that is how they love to grow it in China and Japan."³⁸ This informs the reader of the "proper" way to grow wisteria in order to achieve an Oriental look in the garden. Along with pagodas and Japanese stepping-stones, Eaton specifies, "there will be no distinct form or style to my garden."³⁹ If this could be read as imagining a mixed race future, it is quite evident that her garden remains an amalgam of "English ivy" and native plants along with Japanese "exotics."⁴⁰ Her informative plant descriptions position Eaton as an expert who knows the "correct" way to position plants that aligns with eastern aesthetics. Specifically, Eaton provides tips to merge eastern plants with western plants that would be most appropriate for the United States suburbs and white middle and upper-class women. Traditional "Italian, Dutch, even Japanese gardens are

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 130.

³⁸ Watanna, "A Neighbor's Garden," 120.

³⁹ Ibid., 121.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 121.

out of place in America,” she lectures, “and look incongruous in the shadow of an American country house.”⁴¹ Eaton provides ways for white women readers to incorporate aspects of eastern design while maintaining an “American” appeal. Gardens, as extensions of domestic interiors, were not just spaces for women but spaces where white women could actively consume a westernized version of the Orient.

Yet, while this piece reads as a guidebook for suburban wealthy women, who can presumably afford hiring a gardener for the hard labor, Eaton’s attributes her love of gardening to her immigrant mother:

I often think of my mother, and her pathetic attempts to recall the bloom of the flowering land of Japan which had been her home. The first time she made the long journey to this country, she carried with her a dozen or more boxes in which seeds and slips were planted, and even at sea she had her little green growth always with her. Here in America she was never without her own bit of a garden, her ‘flowering spot,’ as she named it, and often it consisted only of an ugly hotel window ledge, or the roof of some city house. But she never lost her passionate love for flowers, and she passed this trait along to me.⁴²

On the one hand, Eaton’s incorporation of her mother’s story serves as a reinforcement of her own “Oriental” lineage and authority to provide advice on Japanese gardens. Eaton’s articulation of her mother as Japanese illustrates the continued blurring of nonfiction and fiction in her work. Yet more importantly, like the gardener who rototills white women’s gardens, Eaton establishes immigrants as essential yet often invisible contributors, responsible for bringing these coveted “exotic” Japanese flowers to New York suburban gardens.

⁴¹ Ibid., 110.

⁴² Ibid., 109.

The cultivation and collection of seeds have a contentious past that connects to colonialism as the conquest of land and the collection of plants and seeds typically went hand-in-hand.⁴³ In 1852, botanists like James Morrow accompanied Commodore Matthew Perry on his trip to Japan and functioned as agents of empire. Morrow's booty was 1,500 specimens and 17 cases of plants.⁴⁴ Subsequent trips to Japan were made for tea seeds for United States cultivation. However, prior to 1898 there was no formalized collection system in place. Instead, government officials called upon immigrants and traders to collect and bring seeds into the country as part of their "service" to the United States.⁴⁵ This approach helped the United States become an early leader in agriculture. Immigrants like Eaton's mother took this call for national "service" seriously and played an important role in the diversification of plants and flowers in the United States. Asian immigrants, and particularly Japanese laborers, were also central to the production of gardens beginning in the late nineteenth century.⁴⁶ In California, for instance, Japanese immigrants' early farming experience contributed to the transition into maintenance gardening within wealthy Anglo-American yards. As Chinese became excluded from immigration into California in 1882, many estate owners turned to Mexican and Japanese laborers in a system that "rested on the migration and a racialized and stratified system of design and labor."⁴⁷ And yet within this exploitative system, gardens allowed immigrants to infuse plants and seed from their

⁴³ Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009).

⁴⁴ Robert James Griesbach, "150 Years of Research at the United States Department of Agriculture: Plant Introduction and Breeding" United States Department of Agriculture, 2013.

⁴⁵ Howard L. Hyland, "History of US Plant Introduction." *Environmental Review* 2.4 (1977), 26-27.

⁴⁶ Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Paradise Transplanted: Migration and the Making of California Gardens* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

homeland, which functioned as a source of power by enabling them to actively shaping their new environment with familiar cultural elements.⁴⁸

Eaton, like white women who were domestic writers, analyzed the home through the lens of botany, imbuing women with the authority to reform the home and transform society.⁴⁹ In many ways this new science of the home mirrored the rise of the profession of public health and the science of eugenics. Comparing the home to a science laboratory, domestic advisors relied on science to make the home (and family) safer and cleaner and therefore better for society.⁵⁰ For instance, domestic advisors cautioned against stagnant air in the bedroom and using the “fresh-air theory,” they called upon women to maintain proper ventilation of the house.⁵¹ In particular, flowers were indicators of air quality—a thriving, growing plant or blooming flower meant that a “house was properly warmed and ventilated.”⁵² In sharp contrast to descriptions by missionaries and public health officials, who represented immigrant homes as dark, lacking sunshine, and clean air, Eaton marks her immigrant mother’s care for her physical environment.⁵³ The cramped home may have been surrounded by the elements of the city but Eaton evokes the same type of social refinement and civilization as was perceived in middle and upper-class white women’s suburban homes—through flowers.

Moreover, Eaton also displays her own class privilege with her residence in the New York suburbs. No longer confined to the compact houses in the city, Eaton is able to continue her

⁴⁸ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁹ Levitt, *From Catherine Beecher to Martha Stewart*, 5.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 41.

⁵¹ Ibid., 64. Fresh-air theory was the belief that fresh air was directly related to good health. Health officials even opened up “fresh-air schools” where students with tuberculosis would open the windows, wrapped in blankets and near a stove, in the belief that the fresh air would prolong their life.

⁵² Ibid., 65.

⁵³ Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 112.

mother's love for gardening in the suburbs. The suburbs, in and of itself, was seen as a positive development for middle and upper-class whites as prominent American eugenicist, Charles Davenport saw suburban development and real estate as a "healthy" space, in contrast to the crowded cities rife with epidemic diseases.⁵⁴

Discourses of eugenics shaped attitudes toward racial mixing. At the turn of the century, eugenics was still in its infancy, unevenly defined and constantly debated as it developed from botany.⁵⁵ In 1913 it was simply considered the science of improving plants and animals.⁵⁶ The rediscovery of Mendel genetics in 1900 positioned pedigree and inbreeding in plants as having the ability to produce superior strains. Reflecting observations from nature in plants and animals, leading scientists like Darwin and Mendel then connected their plant observations to human populations and contributed to the growing field of eugenics. Coined in 1883 by British scientist Francis Galton, eugenicists described pathological tendencies with health related illness in ways that linked, and justified, racism and anti-immigration legislation.⁵⁷ By the 1930s, the definition of eugenics had become more precise. In addition to being described as a process that improves the hereditary of a race or breed, it was also defined as "restricting mating to superior types suited to each other."⁵⁸ As both a field of study and profession, eugenics and eugenicists specifically legitimized the racism of nonwhites while justifying the superiority of white, middle and upper-class able-bodied Americans.

⁵⁴ Christina Cogdell, *Eugenic Design: Streamlining America in the 1930s* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). See also Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985).

⁵⁵ The actual term was coined in 1883 by British scientist Francis Galton.

⁵⁶ Ewa Barbara Luczak, *Breeding and Eugenics in the American Literary Imagination: Heredity Rules in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

⁵⁷ Teng, *Eurasian*, 92.

⁵⁸ Qtd. in Luczak, *Breeding and Eugenics*, 2.

As early as the nineteenth century, interracial sex between whites and Asians, particularly Chinese was considered a public health concern, condemned by missionaries, doctors, and scientists. Racial mixing was thought to transmit racialized diseases like leprosy and syphilis that would “infect” white familial lines.⁵⁹ Eugenicists outlined and idealized “fit” mothers and called upon these women to repopulate the United States in the name of nationalism. For social conservatives, the use of eugenics was a nativist response that was thought to solve the low birthrates of white middle-class women that had eroded with the expansion of educational and career opportunities—a direct response against the New Woman. While eugenicists saw women’s roles as centrally tied to procreation, some aspect of eugenics were embraced by advocates of birth control. Yet most eugenicists were firmly opposed to women’s autonomy or women’s rights. Margaret Sanger connected arguments advocating for birth control with eugenics and its successful framing was due in large part to the belief that reproductive rights were more than just a woman’s issue but was instead part of “a larger social agenda aiming at building a new and better race.”⁶⁰ Motherhood and the domestic had become a central component of the national agenda and provided opportunities for women to address their roles in the family.

Eugenics was, most famously, used for sterilization of people with mental illnesses but it played a central role in justifying anti-miscegenation laws, primarily by analyzing the effects of miscegenation and interracial sex—the “hybrid” offspring. For instance, scientists who followed Mendelian genetics saw hybrids as constituting a separate racial species that would naturally

⁵⁹ Shah, *Contagious Divides*, chapter 3.

⁶⁰ Luczak, *Breeding and Eugenics*, 101.

degenerate and prove sterile, like mules.⁶¹ Scientists turned to “biracial mulattos,” whom they believed were “physically weak and constitutionally frail, that they were flighty and effete, and that they could not reproduce beyond the third generation.” In examining the history of Chinese mixed race, Emma Teng explains that the “hybrid vigor,” a belief that pointed toward the strength, vitality, and health of mixed race individuals, was a minority perspective. However, when it was used, it was propelled through observations of plants and animals. Using examples of plants, for instance, compelled advocates of “hybrid vigor” to illustrate the positive possibilities of racial mixing. Starting as early as the nineteenth century, this “constructive miscegenation” did not garner a lot of support within the continental United States, but served to explain successful mixed race communities and places like Hawai‘i and Latin America.⁶² However, this was not a common sentiment. In most popular and scientific writings, racial hybridity was viewed as a growing problem. The racial hybrid was depicted as “weak, indolent, lacking vitality, short lived, infertile, and susceptible to disease. Physically they were purportedly prone to alcoholism, promiscuity, criminality, hysteria, insanity, and suicide.”⁶³ By the late nineteenth century, degeneration theory was linked to an inherent criminality, popularized by Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso.⁶⁴ Lombroso argued that those of “mixed race” had a particular tendency to inherit criminal and violent behavior.⁶⁵ Newspapers were also quick to make connections between race and criminal behavior. Specifically, criminals that were white with Chinese ancestry were easily classified as “born to crime.”⁶⁶ Why was there such confusion

⁶¹ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003), 101.

⁶² Teng, *Eurasian*, 95-96.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, chapter 3.

of how to scientifically categorize mixed race? This myth of hybrid degeneracy was a blatant attempt to deploy science to sway individuals against sexual intimacies across the racial divide.

Discourses of eugenics and plant hybridity thus converged with the discourses of racial hybridity in humans, intersecting at specific points and overlapping most prominently when they could provide fodder in political debates over interracial sex or marriage. The racialization of hybrid plants, in other words, was viewed as an antecedent that could predict the outcomes for racial mixing among humans. The slippage between plants and animals was arguably intentional, in the service of managing interactions between races based upon the assumption of ahistoric truth found in nature's laws. Eaton deployed the same blurring between plants and animals but instead she did it through the framing of their assimilatory potential and their "hybrid vigor."

In "A Neighbor's Garden," Eaton's self-representation is constructed against these ideas of hybrid degeneracy.⁶⁷ For instance, in contrast to beliefs about hybrid infertility, Eaton participates in eugenic rhetoric by establishing the fact that she had produced healthy and "fat babies."⁶⁸ Although she does not cite her husband's race, at the time she was married to Bertrand Babcock who was described elsewhere as of Puritan stock. More specifically, Babcock enjoyed the status of a "legitimately" white American at a time when ethnic Europeans' status was often in doubt.⁶⁹ In contrast to being "weak" and "lacking vitality," Eaton describes herself as "young, healthy, and ambitious," going as far as to compare her vigor to a man's when she builds her

⁶⁷ Ferens, *Edith and Winnifred Eaton*, 128. Eaton was at least familiar with the early work of eugenics in plants such as Thomas H. Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1895).

⁶⁸ Watanna, "A Neighbor's Garden," 116.

⁶⁹ For scholarship on whiteness studies see Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*; Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*; Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks*.

own planter box.⁷⁰ In doing so, Eaton aligns herself with middle-class white women, who were positioned as responsible for the moral and physical health of family.⁷¹ But by acknowledging her immigrant mother from the Orient, Eaton signals to the audience that racial mixing has the potential to produce healthy women, like herself, who could reproduce middle-class values. Published in *Good Housekeeping* and with a mixture of stories and advice columns, the magazine served to assist women in their domestic duties. According to their mission statement, they sought “to produce and perpetuate perfection — or as near unto perfection as may be attained in the household.”⁷² If the mission statement is taken seriously, Eaton’s article incorporates Eurasians into the construction of the “perfect” household.

Written ten years earlier, Eaton’s “The Half Caste” (1898) explicitly employs scientific discourse through the guise of character traits and disposition, participating in this emerging field to discuss white-Asian intermixing and advocating for its inclusion as part of the “perfect” middle-class household. Published in *Conkey’s Home Journal* that was promoted as a family magazine and circulated in smaller towns and cities, the “The Half Caste” reads as an informative and impartial piece about race mixing. The absence of Eaton as a subject in “The Half Caste” is even more pronounced when read against “A Neighbor’s Garden,” which clearly positions Eaton as coming from an immigrant Japanese mother.

Eaton’s article advocates for a type of exceptionalism and superiority of “half castes.” In “The Half Caste,” Eaton takes an omniscient point of view, distancing herself from the subject. Her use of “they” to describe what Eaton calls “Japanese half breeds” produces an air of

⁷⁰ Watanna, “A Neighbor’s Garden,” 116.

⁷¹ Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 105.

⁷² “The History of the Good Housekeeping Institute,” *Good Housekeeping* (Oct. 31, 2015), <http://www.goodhousekeeping.com/institute/about-the-institute/a17940/good-housekeeping-institute-timeline/>, accessed Dec. 27, 2017.

objectivity as she describes their disposition of “precocious,” “sharpness,” and “brightness” to their behavior as “reticent,” “slow to make friends,” “erratic and moody,” and “generous to a fault.”⁷³ While Eaton does provide some less than favorable characteristics, the overall piece leans heavily on characteristics that are positive and celebrates ideal behaviors.

However, despite the general title of her article, Eaton announces that her focus is on the examination of Japanese and Caucasian “half castes.”⁷⁴ This could have been an effort to distance Japanese mixed race from Chinese mixed race, since Chinese immigrants in California were perceived as the sources of infections and diseases, and their physical characteristics were seen as a testament of their moral and intellectual inferiority.⁷⁵ For instance, it was feared that whites who intermixed with Chinese would degenerate to have “copper colored syphilitic skin” since “syphilis infection was imagined as emblematic of the Chinese race.”⁷⁶ Even simply being near Chinese—employing them as domestic servants or socializing with them in opium dens, was thought to transmit diseases to whites.⁷⁷

This distance from Chinese and white intermixing could be read as implicitly endorsing the critique of white and Chinese intermixing in the attempt to advocate for Japanese and white intermixing. For instance, Eaton sets up a strategic public proposition that interbreeding whites with Japanese would produce ideal characteristics in both physical appearance and talent. Eaton explains, “half breeds” are pretty “children of ordinary parentage” who “are born artists. Maybe they inherit this from the Japanese, and being born in that home of beauty their passionate love

⁷³ Watanna, “A Neighbor’s Garden,” 149.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁷⁵ Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides*.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

of nature can be understood.”⁷⁸ For eugenicists, racial fitness and strong heredity amounted to character traits and also appearance.⁷⁹ Since beauty was aesthetic that was deemed not a product of cultural preference but instead as objective scientific fact, the strategic breeding by ordinary parentage across the racial divide could, according to Eaton, produce a superior person in looks and character. However, Eaton acknowledges that their greatness is hindered by the environmental prejudices they felt by both Japan and the United States. In this way, “half caste” success is inherent in character but simply hampered by environmental impediments because “from constantly being called names and shunned, they become morose, bitter and harsh in their judgments.”⁸⁰

Although “A Neighbor’s Garden” is more tempered in her advocacy of racial mixing, both pieces show how Eaton used the scientific language to contest scientific racism directed at Eurasians. Science was the language in which the realities of mixed race, its dangers or values, came to the fore during this time period. Couched in domestic themes, Eaton attempted to counter these myths, establishing the cultural and environmental importance of mixing plants and people, to a white middle-class female audience who were simultaneously and voraciously consuming her fictional Japanese-themed romance novels.

Eurasians and the Environment

While Eaton’s earlier writing used eugenic thinking to advocate for racial intermarriage based on hybrid vigor, some of her later work is less focused on explicitly highlighting a mixed

⁷⁸ Watanna, “A Neighbor’s Garden,” 152.

⁷⁹ Martin S. Pernick, *The Black Stork: Eugenics and the Death of ‘Defective’ Babies in American Medicine and Motion Pictures since 1915* (New York: Oxford UP, 1996), 61.

⁸⁰ Watanna, “A Neighbor’s Garden,” 152.

race identity and shows her furthering her engagement with eugenic debates to argue that environmental factors were more important than biology. By the turn of the century, eugenicists were debating the importance of environment or race in producing healthy people. Luther Burbank, a botanist nicknamed “Plant Wizard,” was famous for creating new hybrid varieties of fruits, plants, and flowers. In 1906, he published an article in the *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, which often published Eaton’s works as well. Originally entitled, *Scribner’s Monthly: An Illustrated Magazine for the People* until 1881, its readers came from predominantly upper-middle-class backgrounds. The magazine contained articles on history and contemporary events, biographical essays, and the latest news within the fields of science and technology. It was also nationalist in slant and catered to the ideas of white male Protestants.⁸¹ Burbank’s article, “The Training of the Human Plant” indicated the similarities between plants and humans and highlighted his belief in strategic breeding as a way to produce the best traits. Importantly, Burbank saw environment as the key contributor to the success of hybrid plants. For example, Burbank notes that when plant breeders merge wild strains with over civilized strains that have lost their virility the result, with proper environment and care, is a “far stronger race if the right principles are followed, a magnificent race, superior to any proceeding it.”⁸² Burbank rejected Mendel’s laws of heredity and instead saw environment as a key condition.⁸³

⁸¹ Mark J. Noonan, *Reading the Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine: American Literature and Culture, 1870-1893* (Kent: Kent State UP, 2010).

⁸² Luther Burbank, *The Training of the Human Plant*, New York: The Century Co. (1907), Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/trainingofhumanp00burbiala>, accessed Dec. 27, 2017, 128.

⁸³ William D Stansfield, “Luther Burbank: Honorary Member of the American Breeder’s Association.” *The Journal of Heredity* 97.2 (2006), 95. Burbank followed French biologist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck who believed in the “inheritance of acquired characteristics,” which meant that alterations in favorable environment would result in favorable (or unfavorable) changes that were then inheritable.

Like Burbank, Eaton saw fitness as connected to the social circumstances of, for example, New Yorkers, and this became more pronounced in her writing after she moved away from New York. Upon marriage to her second husband, Francis Reeve, in 1917 Eaton moved from the United States to Calgary, where she aided her husband in his cattle business. Eaton's personal correspondence shows that she recognized that marrying Reeve meant a sacrifice to what she calls was a "promising career as a writer" in the United States.⁸⁴ During her residence in Calgary from 1917 to 1924, Eaton continued publishing including two novels, *Cattle* (1924) and *His Royal Nibs* (1925) with a theme focused on ranching in Canada. Her nonfiction writing was frequently published in the local presses such as the *Calgary Daily Herald* and the *Montreal Daily Star*. Yet one publication in 1919 diverges considerably from her ranching themes. "Other People's Troubles: An Antidote to Your Own" is set in New York and focused on health and tenement life in the urban city. It was printed as a serialized story in a Calgary newspaper, *Farm and Ranch Review*. Described as "the middle west family magazine," *The Farm and Ranch Review* circulated from 1905 to 1966 as the Western-Canadian agricultural publication and catered to wealthy audiences interested in livestock and farm equipment.⁸⁵ The journal also identified and catered to women as it gave considerable space to cooking recipes and columns like "Sewing Talking."⁸⁶

"Other People's Troubles: An Antidote to Your Own" describes a doctor, Dr. Carpenter, who treats women patients with nontraditional prescriptions. Like many of her other magazine publications, Eaton's story is autobiographical. She explains the story arose when her son

⁸⁴ Personal note by Winnifred Eaton. Winnifred Eaton Papers, collection 299/82.13, box 14.

⁸⁵ *Advertising & Selling*, volume 29, issues 1-27 (Jan. 1, 1919), Google Play, accessed on Dec. 27, 2017.

⁸⁶ *The Farm and Ranch Review*, Calgary, Canada, vol. xii, no. 2 (January 20, 1916) <http://sabnewspapers.usask.ca/islandora/object/sab%3A7981>, accessed on Dec. 27, 2017.

(Bertie) died from a trepanning operation in 1908 after a nurse dropped him down the stairs. The trepanning operation was an emergency surgery used to reduce brain swelling.⁸⁷ Instead of medicine or surgery, however, Dr. Carpenter cures his patients' pain by providing stories about other people in more dire situations. The remedy he provides is the "contemplation of other troubles greater than our own."⁸⁸ However, for his own niece, who is suffering from the embarrassment of being stood up at the altar, this "medicine" of seeing other peoples' trouble is ineffective. Dr. Carpenter's solution is to appease her desire to avenge her fiancé by connecting her with a lawyer, Lenox Holt, who (unbeknownst to her) is another emotionally broken person. In the end, Dr. Carpenter's niece and Lenox Holt meet and fall in love. The story combines a romantic love theme alongside ideas of eugenic fitness.

Through this story, Eaton shows how love could not transcend health and fitness. For instance, in Dr. Carpenter's retelling of Mrs. Finnerty's death of her newborns because her "dipsomania," the story also clearly illustrates that the poverty of Mrs. Finnerty and her inability to properly care for her sick child in the beginning of life because she was forced to work, exacerbated her situation. In retelling the story, the doctor explains that her child "had no chance to commence with. Of diseased and degenerate stock, he hadn't the constitution to put up a game fight against conditions—the dark and damp hole that was his home, the uncertain and more often than not unwholesome food provided for him irregularly."⁸⁹ Eaton's language of "degenerate stock" mirrors that of eugenicists, but the compelling reason for the child's death is most vividly described by the lack of a proper environment and poor nutrition. Readers are

⁸⁷ Birchall, *Onoto Watanna*, 102-103.

⁸⁸ Winnifred Eaton (Onoto Watanna), "Other People's Troubles: An Antidote for Your Own," *Farm and Ranch Review* (Feb. 5, 1919).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

meant to feel fortunate that they do not encounter those conditions in their own homes. Eugenic leaders and scientists saw mental impairments, like alcoholism, as producing degenerate stock and as a far more serious threat than physical disabilities.⁹⁰ And in this case, it is the mother's mental deficiencies, wrought by alcohol that led to the physical disabilities of the child. As Eaton's column gained publication a year before the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment banning alcohol, it followed the scientific belief that many temperance supporters ascribed, which was that alcohol not only produced birth defects but it also produced a long lineage of physical deformities.⁹¹ In this way, Eaton showcases both the genetic conditions and environmental conditions as precursors to grief and sorrow.

Dr. Carpenter's curing of the world's ills is also a result of his own health condition. At the end of the story Holt calls upon the doctor only to find him having a seizure. At that moment he realizes, "the old man who has given his life to the alleviation of other peoples' troubles has colossal ones of his own. He now knows why Dr. Carpenter refused to marry the woman he loved, and pretending indifference to her induced her to marry a rival. The doctor for a great many years has had a slow but terrible organic disease."⁹² While Eaton's storyline centralizes the love story between Dr. Carpenter's niece and Holt, Eaton's denial of Dr. Carpenter's love complicates her alignment with degeneracy as simply socially and environmentally induced. As a doctor, he was not in the same position as Mrs. Finnerty. Yet like Mrs. Finnerty, and in a way that was eerily similar to the policing of interracial relationships, Dr. Carpenter is denied reciprocity of love. In the midst of scientific debate, many writers fell into this problem where

⁹⁰ Pernick, *The Black Stork*, 71.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁹² Winnifred Eaton Reeve (Onoto Watanna). "Other People's Troubles," story synopsis, Winnifred Eaton Papers, collection 299/82.13, box 13.

they inconsistently aligned with various sides of the debate. It was often the case that the “same writer could ridicule eugenic plans to police matrimony in one context and unwittingly or consciously endorse the eugenic rhetoric of white supremacy, social control and degeneration in another.”⁹³ Also, like many writers during this period, Eaton’s stories never made direct reference to the word “eugenics.”⁹⁴ But beginning as early as 1904, writings and films began to question the eugenic belief that science should trump love.⁹⁵ In this story, Eaton demonstrates that science and fitness are more important than love. Having already established that Japanese mixed race people were physically and morally fit, positioning Dr. Carpenter as intelligent, emphatic, and yet “unfit” can be read as a radical call to closely examine the racial fitness of upper-class and middle-class whites.

Eurasian Backlash

Unfortunately, very few people were convinced that racial mixing produced “hybrid vigor.” In 1907, the *New York Times* noted scathingly that despite the hundreds of articles written about Burbank, he understood nothing of horticulture or science.⁹⁶ Taking a critical tone, the article explains that “of course it is too late to turn him into a scientific investigator, but hereafter what he does will be recorded and made available as part of the general knowledge, and the public will be saved from such mistakes as that of considering a spineless cactus something new, when it is only an example of reversion and degeneration.”⁹⁷ According to the critic, and

⁹³ Luczak, *Breeding and Eugenics*.

⁹⁴ Pernick, *The Black Stork*, 133.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁹⁶ “Topic of the Times: Mr. Burbank Not a ‘Wizard,’” *NY Times* (Feb. 27 1907).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

echoing the popular sentiments and discourse of racial mixing, it was Burbank's promotion of plant hybridity that made him an illegitimate scientist.

As an outspoken advocate for racial mixing, Eaton faced backlash as well. In 1924, when Reeve's cattle business began to struggle, Eaton moved back to New York, seeing the move as a financial necessity and a chance to reinstate her writing career. In her personal correspondence, she reached out to contacts, far and wide, in the attempt to begin generating an income again. She received a letter, presumably in response, from *Never the Twain Shall Meet* (1923) author Peter B. Kyne on January 21, 1924. Kyne began his letter by making it clear that he had never heard of her newest novel, *Sunny San* (1922) and that she should expect it will be difficult to turn it into a play in New York. He then responds to what is perhaps a point that she made in her letter concerning a negative statement he made about Eurasians. He clarifies:

I never made the statement that all Eurasians are degenerate [...] Man is an animal and subject to the same laws of heredity, etc. as a dog, and I think that even Japanese scientists will bear me out in my assertion that all too frequently not only the Eurasian, but the half-breed Indian, or Chinese or negro inherits the most unworthy traits of each parent and few of their worthy ones. I believe it is Nature's method of protesting [...] and the word degenerate in the sense that I used it did not imply solely moral or sexual degeneracy, but moral and physical decay incident upon the continuous mating of the issue of diverse colored peoples.⁹⁸

Kyne's response is lengthy and illustrates how, regardless of the ethnic identity of Eaton, all racial intermixing was viewed with contempt and discuss. Blatant white superiority is evident in

⁹⁸ Letter to Winnifred Reeve from Allen B. Kyne (Jan. 21, 1924), Winnifred Eaton Papers, collection 299/82.13, box 1.

Kyne's letter and justified through the perceived scientific observations in nature. Kyne next details the experiment in which he mated turkeys on his farm, interbreeding and producing what he calls "Eurasian turkeys—and the result was chaos. They were small, undersized, weak and sickly and soon died because they had no vitality. It was one mixture too many. That can and does happen with human beings [...] Yes, this half and half thing IS hard upon the victim [...] both sides feel sorry for you and both talk about you and neither bothers to hide a sense of superiority or disguise pity for contempt."⁹⁹ While Eaton and others attempted to elevate perceptions of Japanese and Eurasians in the United States through eugenics, Kyne's comments speak to the common resistance to racial mixing. Being Eurasian set Eaton apart from other writers and enabled her to capitalize on themes of the Orient. Eaton's mixed race identity was a central part of her literary career and professionalism—one that allowed her to respond to the racism that she encountered through these cultural avenues of writing. Yet it also precluded her from the privileges of white middle-class women who comprised her audience or who resided in the homes next to her.

By the 1920s, eugenics was at its height of popularity. What began as a loose connection between botany, horticulture, and farming was now a central topic across a wide spectrum of disciplines. By the close of 1924, when Eaton received the letter from Kyne, eugenics would help shape the most virulent anti-immigration law, the Johnson-Reed Act.¹⁰⁰ By mixing science with politics, eugenicists saw the management of the domestic space of the home as a national policy problem.¹⁰¹ It regulated the types of gendered interracial relationships, like the Cable Act of 1922 that prohibited white women from marrying Asian men. Reaching an apex in the late

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Luczak, *Breeding and Eugenics*.

¹⁰¹ Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier*, 27.

1920s, sociologists like Robert Park and Everett Stonquist saw mulattos and specifically Eurasians as not only physically affected but also pathologically inflected. Park's marginal man thesis proclaimed that those of "mixed blood" had "spiritual instability, intensified self-consciousness, restlessness, and malaise."¹⁰² These leading scholars determined how mulattos and Eurasians were seen and perceived, solidifying the scientific and academic standard on the topics of interracial mixing and interracial offspring.

Conclusion

During World War II, Nazis deployed eugenics in the service of genocide, prompting British and American scientists to sign the "Geneticist Manifesto." This protest "opened the door to the criticism of eugenics on scientific grounds and thus facilitated its future rejection by science."¹⁰³ Given this history, it is important to remember that eugenics was widely considered "progressive" scientific theory in the early decades of the twentieth century, its status reflected in the celebration of the opening of Charles Davenports' Eugenic Record Office in New York in 1910, the creation of the American Eugenics Society and dedicated eugenic journals in the 1920s, and the array of eugenic centered activities like the Fitter Families and Best Sermon Contests.¹⁰⁴ As a "cutting edge discipline," eugenics "sparked the imagination of leading scientists of the day."¹⁰⁵ Seen in this light, Eaton's adoption of the discourse of eugenics was unsurprising. Unlike most eugenicists, however, Eaton packaged the "scientific" and

¹⁰² Rainier Spencer, *Reproducing Race: The Paradox of Generation Mix* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2011), 44.

¹⁰³ Luczak, *Breeding and Eugenics* 37. See also Christina Cogdell who argues that eugenics did not disappear in the 1930s but its scientific research goals shifted into the field of genetics. Cogdell, *Eugenic Design*, xiii.

¹⁰⁴ Luczak, *Breeding and Eugenics*, 3.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

“progressive” logic of racial improvement for white, middle-class women on the terrain of domesticity in order to advocate for racial mixing. While the science of eugenics was a tool for racial exclusion, discrimination, forced sterilization, and anti-miscegenation laws, Eaton wielded science in the interest of racial mixing, subtly advocating for a mixed race identity.

Chapter 3

Merle Oberon: The Gendered Marketing and Consumption of Mixed Race in Hollywood

“Miss Oberon belongs to the glamorous school of beauties—with slanting dark eyes, black hair and oval face,” the column, “Screen Gossip,” declared in the *Boston Post* on December 11, 1934.¹ When actress Merle Oberon arrived in Hollywood in the 1930s, her phenotype was a source of fixation in newspapers and fan magazines. Oberon’s perceived exotic look fueled rumors in early Hollywood that she was Anglo-Indian or Eurasian. Oberon dismissed these rumors, saying she was white—born in Tasmania and raised in India before moving to London. In one interview, Oberon definitively asserted, “[...] I’m not a Eurasian. My parents were English and Irish and my full name is Estelle Merle O’Brien.”² Oberon did not claim to be Eurasian, but her engagement with these rumors helped her secure film roles, increased her star persona and value, and more broadly functioned to cultivate a type of Eurasian desirability within the film, cosmetics, and fashion industries. At the same time, Oberon’s self-branding as white prevented her from being racially typecast so she could pursue more diverse roles in Hollywood.

Several rumors existed that pegged Oberon as mixed race Indian, white, and then more recently as mixed race Chinese. Four years after Oberon’s death, biographers Charles Higham and Roy Mosley’s *Princess Merle* (1983) uncovered a birth certificate that established Oberon as Anglo-Indian, born in Bombay, India to an English father and Eurasian (Anglo-Indian) mother

¹ “Screen Gossip,” *Boston Post* (Dec. 11, 1934), Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, “Scrapbook #6 1934-1935,” Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, CA. Hereafter cited as Merle Oberon Papers.

² Untitled article, Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, “Scrapbook #6 1934-1935.”

with a “part-Maori background.”³ Her baptismal certificate corresponds to Higham and Mosley’s story, which names her as Estelle Merle Thompson and lists her parents as engineer Arthur Thompson and Constance Thompson (figure 2.1).⁴ This evidence would appear to put to rest the obfuscation of Oberon’s racial background. However, after the publication of the biography, *Princess Merle*, Australians and Tasmanians disregarded Oberon’s Indian birth certificate and baptismal record and instead embraced a new rumor, which positioned Oberon as being born to a Chinese mother, Lottie Chintock, and a white British father and therefore reestablished Tasmania as her birthplace.⁵ While there was and continues to be fascination about Oberon’s “true” racial identity, this chapter does not attempt to confirm or dispel the rumors about Oberon. I view Oberon’s “true” racial identity as less relevant than the fact that she demonstrated a keen awareness of the circulation of her image in newspaper and fan magazines, onscreen in film, and in person as well as an understanding of the racial meanings that were being attached to the perceptions of her as both white and mixed race.

This chapter traces the mixed race genealogies and the marketability of racial mixing from the 1930s to argue that Oberon’s success relied on women’s consumer power in ways that helped shape perceptions of the modern woman. Women were the primary moviegoers, spent \$750 million on cosmetics and beauty products in the United States in 1931, and were the main

³ Charles Higham and Roy Mosley. *Princess Merle: The Romantic Life of Merle Oberon* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1983), 18. However, they also posit the idea that Merle’s true birthmother was actually her half-sister (which would then make Constance Thompson her maternal grandmother).

⁴ Baptismal certificate, Estelle Merle Thompson, Emmanuel Church, Bombay, India, Mar. 16, 1911, National British Library, copyright British Library board, N/3/105/27.

⁵ Maree Delofski, dir. *The Trouble with Merle*. National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, 55 min., 2002.

Girgaum

BAPTISMS solemnized at Emmanuel Church within the Archdeaconry and Diocese of Bombay in the year of our LORD 1911.

No.	WEEK BAPTIZED.			SUNDAY TO BE BAPTIZED.			Child's Christian Name.	Sex.	PARENTS' NAMES.		Abode of Parents.	Quality, Trade or Profession of Father.	Name of Priest or Minister by whom the Ceremony was performed.
	Year.	Month.	Day.	Year.	Month.	Day.			Christian.	Surname.			
27	1911	Febry	27 th	1911	Janry	12	Ethel Marie	girl	Joseph Edward * Eileen Ethel Maude	Rylands	Bombay	Commercial Traveler	Thomas W. Sharpley C. M. S.
28	1911	March	16 th	1911	Febry	19	Estelle Marie	girl	Arthur & Constance	Tompson	Bombay	Engineer	Thomas W. Sharpley C. M. S.

I, the undersigned Rev. J. W. Sharpley ~~Clergyman~~ Clergyman in Spiritual charge of Emmanuel Church do hereby certify that the foregoing entries ~~two~~ ^{two} in number and distinguished respectively by the number 27 to 28 both inclusive are true and faithful copies of all the entries in the Register of Baptisms belonging to and kept at Emmanuel Church within the Archdeaconry and Diocese of Bombay as therein entered and made between the first day of Janry and the last day of March in the year of our Lord 1911.

Witness my hand,
(Signature) *Sgt. Thomas W. Sharpley*
(Official designation) *Incumbent*
(Address) *Emmanuel Church, Girgaum.*

3rd April 1911

Figure 2.1 Baptismal certificate, Estelle Merle Thompson, Emmanuel Church, Bombay, India, Mar. 16, 1911, National British Library, copyright British Library board, N/3/105/27

readership for fan magazines which foregrounded a dizzying combination of fashion, beauty and cosmetics, and Hollywood glamour.⁶ The New Woman specifically shaped marketing in ways that accounted for their new, more transgressive, forms of public engagement and behavior. The New Woman was hailed as demanding more political, intellectual, and economic independence and opportunity.⁷

⁶ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 196.

⁷ Susan A. Glenn, *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000). Glenn traces the New Woman as a term used from the 1890s to 1920s. However, these ideologies remained through the 1930s and 1940s as well.

While Oberon's early exotic characterization aligned with the desire of the white male gaze that sought to consume the female Other onscreen, Oberon's racially ambiguous persona also catered to the New Woman who sought to replicate her desirability through the products she purchased. The recognition of the power of multiracials within contemporary marketing has become a visible demographic only recently as "racially ambiguous-looking people" began to be used in advertising with more frequency in the 1990s primarily because they were "designed to appeal to a broad, ethnically nonspecific audience."⁸ This branding technique has been generally assumed to be a result of the rapid globalization and technological advancements of the twentieth century. Kimberly DaCosta employs the term "marketing multiraciality" to point out that multiracials were not only used in advertisements but were being viewed as a consumer group and distinct demographic with specific needs.⁹ By denaturalizing the relationship between marketing and race, this chapter illustrates how racially ambiguous marketing was a technique that was being deployed in the 1930s, embodied by Oberon, propelled by the fashion and beauty industry, and sustained by women's changing consumption habits.¹⁰ Women consumed objects like makeup, fashion, and celebrities but they, like Oberon, were also viewed as objects for

⁸ DaCosta, *Making Multiracials*, 156. See also Matthew Pratt Guterl, *Seeing Race in Modern America*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

⁹ DaCosta, *Making Multiracials*, 157.

¹⁰ Arlene Dávila, *Latinos, Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012). She argues that the scope of scholarship on the relationship between race and marketing is limited due to, among other things, the fact that "marketing discourse is less scrutinized because of its very 'naturalization' and imbrication in everyday life," xxiv. This chapter builds from Dávila's work on marketing of Latinos and DaCosta's work on multiracials more broadly to show that Asian American mixed race was a central component in the marketing of Oberon in the 1930s and helps in better understanding the contours of the market during this time period. See also Shankar, *Advertising Diversity*. Shankar argues that contemporary racial naturalization works beyond legal citizenship but is also seen in how advertisements function to transform Asian Americans into "model consumers" and legitimize their position within the United States culture, 23.

consumption—both empowered and disempowered by this rapidly expanding arena of participation.

The Many Sides of Oberon's Exoticism

Oberon's discovery in Britain by producer and director, Alexander Korda, and subsequent fame in Hollywood was largely attributed to her "exotic loveliness."¹¹ This beauty was considered different from other female stars. Oberon's desirability was a result of the public's reception of Hollywood stars being different "types" and "personalities" and directly correlated to the rise of Hollywood's star system. The cultivation of stars was vital to the economic success of films since studios quickly realized the influence of stars in films helped to garner box office hits and brought increased audiences to the theaters. As a result, the entire film industry catered to the star—from lighting, makeup, set construction, and distribution of the film.¹² Audiences and the film industry saw stars as embodying certain typologies and that type, or personality, was attached to both an actor's onscreen character and off-screen identity.¹³ Racial and ethnic distinctions exacerbated perceived types or personas. For example, Asians and Asian Americans were largely characterized as the "sinister, untrustworthy" Fu Manchu or the "lotus blossom" or "dragon lady" female stereotypes in early Hollywood films. These depictions produced and reflected yellow peril narratives and the political anxieties between the United

¹¹ *Houston Texas Chronicle* (Dec. 9, 1934), Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, "Scrapbook #6 1934-1935."

¹² Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise (1930-1939)* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), 144.

¹³ Kirihara's "The Accepted Idea," 92.

States and its eastern neighbors, particularly Japan and China.¹⁴ Audiences were also obsessed with exotic settings, such as Egypt and the Middle East, and they saw film as a method of resuscitating “disappeared” cultures or investing these places with their Western imaginations of the Orient for the enjoyment of viewers.¹⁵

Women audiences were active consumers of these Orientalist narratives. There was particular appeal to the “vamp” personality, which emerged through the convergence of film and Orientalism as early as the 1910s. The vamp was a fashionable mysterious woman with “seductive sexuality,” who dominated men and asserted her independence. If American fascination with the Orient was reflected in their consumption habits and film choices, for women filmgoers their fascination with the Orientalized “vamp” figure is often read as a desire for independence and autonomy and a celebration of the values of the New Woman, even as it improbably existed in the fantastical site of the east onscreen.¹⁶

Given the solidified popularity of the vamp, Oberon’s dark features made it easy for the studio that held her contract, United Artists, to feature her as an exotic character, first in Europe and then in the United States.¹⁷ Her performance in *The Battle* (1934), renamed *Thunder in the East* for U.S. audiences, correlated with a slurry of rumors that Oberon might be Eurasian and

¹⁴ Marchetti, *Romance and the “Yellow Peril”; Jun Xing, Asian America through the Lens: History, Representations, and Identity* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1998), 54; Kent A. Ono and Vincent N. Pham, *Asian Americans and the Media* (Malden: Polity Press, 2009).

¹⁵ Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and US Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 28.

¹⁶ Gaylyn Studlar, ““Out-Salomeing Salome””: Dance, the New Woman, and Fan Magazine Orientalism,” in *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*, eds., Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar (London: IB Tauris Publishers 1997), 116.

¹⁷ Her first breakout performance as Anna Boleyn was in the historical British drama *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933) resulted in her travel to the United States where she held roles as the exotic women such as Antonita in *The Private Life of Don Juan* (1934) and Baroness Genevieve Cassini in *Folies Bergère de Paris* (1935).

continued to foster a U.S. public perception of Oberon as exotic. In fact, Oberon was often described in relation to Anna May Wong in ways that evoked the same type of Oriental exoticism.¹⁸ Both Wong and Oberon performed a type of Oriental femininity.¹⁹ *The Battle*, set during the Russo-Japanese War, depicts a Japanese naval officer Captain Yorisaka (Charles Boyer) who “forces his wife,” Marquise Yorisaka (Oberon) to seduce a British officer (John Loder) in order to gain top military secrets and information. However, the Japanese woman falls in love with the British officer and when the Japanese commander gets wounded in battle, the British officer comes to the aid of the Japanese military. Realizing his moral wrongdoing to both his wife and the British offer, the film ends with the suicide of the Japanese commander.²⁰ *The Battle* marked Japanese military strength through tropes such as “treachery, duplicity, and deviousness” that had become popular and frequent in cinema after the Russo-Japanese War.²¹ The film represents how in cinema, the “fantastical” site of the Orient “enacted a historiographical and anthropological role, writing (in light) the cultures of others” that reflected and legitimated the imperialist endeavors of the West.²² In particular, Oberon’s character illustrated the stereotypical gendered ways that correlated with the caricatured Orient. Oberon’s character was described as “demure,” submissive, and lacking power as she faced her tyrannical

¹⁸ “The Oriental Heart,” *Western Independent Plymouth* (Nov. 11 1934) Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, “Scrapbook #6 1934-1935.” See also Karen Leong, *The China Mystique* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

¹⁹ Leong, *The China Mystique*, 57.

²⁰ Andre Sennwald, “Program Notes for the Battle.” *New York Times*. (Dec. 2, 1934).

²¹ Peter X. Feng, “Introduction” In *Screening Asian Americans*, ed. Peter X. Feng (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2002).

²² Ella Shohat, “Gender and Culture of Empire: Toward a Feminist Ethnography of the Cinema,” in *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*, eds. Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1997), 24.

husband.²³ And in the end, quite predictably, the interracial relationship is unrealizable. *The Battle* followed the popularity of previous films that showed the Asian woman as sexually available to the white “savior” man, but in ways that foregrounded white men’s power and maintained the perceived racial divide between whites and Asians.

If Oberon was white, her role playing a Japanese woman in *The Battle* was undoubtedly an assertion of a type of white privilege that allowed her access to the consumption and costuming of whites playing and flirting with the possibility or enchantment of the racial Other onscreen. The popularity of white women playing the roles of Oriental characters had more to do with an articulation of white womanhood than Asian femininity. This performance of the Other was a pronouncement of New Woman values like power, autonomy, and the freedom to enact identities other than their own.²⁴ Critics showered Oberon with praise in *The Battle*. In contrast to the uneven reviews of Charles Boyer, Oberon was described as playing the character “with conviction.”²⁵ The *New York Stage* exclaimed that she was “the only woman so far to portray an Oriental without the obvious aid of make-up and chrysanthemums.”²⁶ Oberon’s articulation of a white identity aligned herself with white female audiences who could admire her for embodying the traits of the modern woman while the Eurasian rumors served to make her acting seem more convincing.

Being perceived as white enabled Oberon to expand her acting repertoire beyond the exotic type, starting in the second half of 1935. She played Kitty Vane in the romantic drama *The*

²³ *The San Francisco Call* (May 25, 1935) Merle Oberon Papers, Box 6-OS, “Scrapbook #6 1934-1935.”

²⁴ Yoshihara, *Embracing the East*, 100.

²⁵ See Mary Pickford in *Madame Butterfly* (1915), Myrna Loy in *The Mask of Fu Manchu* (1932), Katharine Hepburn *Dragon Seed* (1944), or later the *Charlie Chan* TV series (1957).

²⁶ *New York Stage* (May 1, 1935), Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, “Scrapbook #6 1934-1935.”

Dark Angel (1935), Mary Smith in the romantic western comedy *The Cowboy and the Lady* (1938), and her most famous role as Cathy Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights* (1939) alongside Laurence Olivier. Oberon's ability to land these diverse leading roles would have been impossible had she claimed an Anglo-Indian or Eurasian identity since whiteness was a prerequisite for holding lead Hollywood roles that was enforced by state municipal boards, third party watch groups, and the Production Code Administration (PCA) (implemented from 1930 to 1956).²⁷ In fact, it was only the onscreen portrayal of miscegenation and homosexuality that were explicitly forbidden by the PCA. The PCA specifically forbade the portrayal of onscreen romantic contact between blacks and whites.²⁸ Relationships between Asians and whites were also policed, although unevenly, onscreen.²⁹ Any hint to sexual relations, kissing, and other intimate contact between white and Asians were regulated, although like all films, the regulations were more a negotiation between filmmakers and the PCA. These regulations precluded nonwhite actors and actresses from gaining a foothold within the industry. For instance, Chinese American actress Anna May Wong's stardom and ability to play lead roles was significantly hampered by "prohibitions against on-screen kissing and off-screen indications of interracial romance."³⁰ Wong was offered only small roles and a significantly limited salary in Hollywood compared to her white colleagues.³¹ Although Sessue Hayakawa's silent film career was more varied and included diverse lead roles, he is most remembered and popularized

²⁷ Balio, *Grand Design*, 40. This included watch groups and early examples of censorship include the 1927 list of "Don'ts and Be Carefuls," which were later incorporated into the PCA.

²⁸ Susan Courtney, *Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation: Spectacular Narratives of Gender and Race, 1903-1967* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005), 104.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Graham Russell Gao Hodges, *Anna May Wong: From Laundryman's Daughter to Hollywood Legend* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 38. Another notable exception includes Dolores Del Rio who was of Mexican origin.

³¹ Wong was forced to move to Europe to advance her career. See Hodges, *Anna May Wong*.

through film characterizations that depicted him as the foreign villain. By the 1920s, he had lost his United States fan base, largely due to growing nativist ideologies and the anti-Japanese movement on the west coast.³² As these examples show, shifting racial attitudes coupled with institutionalized efforts like the Production Code largely excluded various racial groups within Hollywood's star system.

Since Oberon claimed she was white, she was not inhibited from the Production Code. However, had she claimed a mixed race identity, her success would have been stymied, like Wong and Hayakawa. If Oberon was mixed race, she can be read as "passing" for white as a way to advance her career opportunities. Theories of racial passing generally perceive passing as an emotional, political, economic, and cultural negotiation that both challenges and reaffirms dominant racial discourses, particularly ones that insist on the value, desire, and supremacy of whiteness or monoraciality.³³ The reasons for passing varied by individual; it served as a professional strategy (as evident when Sadakichi Hartmann passed for Sidney Allan in chapter one) and/or functioned as a means to circumvent racial discrimination and access resources. Oberon's racial passing granted her a plethora of opportunities such as lead roles, popularity, and a sustained career in acting for fifty years. However, it is her accumulated wealth that is significant to note. If she was mixed race, Oberon's passing functioned as a financial strategy.

The New York Times reported that Oberon received bonuses that amounted to \$20,000 for *Folies*

³² In 1922, Hayakawa was forced to move overseas to in order to continue his acting career. Donald Kiriara, "The Accepted Idea; Daisuke Miyao, *Sessue Hayakawa: Silent Cinema and Transnational Stardom* (Durham: Duke UP, 2007).

³³ Hobbs, *A Chosen Exile*. These moments of passing were, for some, temporary and transitory, while for others were permanent lifestyle decisions and which caused genealogical ruptures and moments of familial and community loss and exile. Other scholars have positioned racial passing as a mode of resistance against dominant racial norms or as illustrative of American individualism that emphasizes concepts such as autonomy, freedom of choice, and self-determination. See Wald, *Crossing the Line*; Pfeiffer, *Race Passing and American Individualism*.

Bergère (1935), \$10,000 for *Dark Angel* (1935), and \$20,000 for *These Three* (1936).³⁴ In contrast, by 1939, the median yearly earning income for class-A actors was only \$4,700.³⁵ By 1946, the Washington DC *Star* reported that Oberon earned \$150,000 per picture.³⁶

In an interview in *Modern Screen* Oberon spoke candidly about her career choice as one made for financial gain. When asked how she became a star, Oberon explains, “I needed money and it was the only way I could think of to get it quickly!” The article then notes, “What! No burning desire from childhood to be a second Bernhardt—no vision to whisper to her? It couldn’t be. I couldn’t imagine finding a successful film star who had worked because she needed money, not because she burned with divine fire.”³⁷ The astonishment by the author illustrates that Oberon’s emphatic response was atypical and establishes the more common understanding that actors saw, or at least publicly claimed, their career pursuit as a form of preordained destiny. But considering the highly-mediated nature of celebrity representation in the media, Oberon’s unabashed claim for monetary incentives did not necessarily mean that she did not also want to be considered another Bernhardt, a woman who had set the standard for female performers, embodied early values of the New Woman, and used theater as a site of self-promotion and self-invention.³⁸ It also fails to recognize Bernhardt as having even an iota of financial motivation for

³⁴ Douglas W. Churchill, “‘Yellow Peril’ Threatens Hollywood: A Chinese Invasion and Other Color News; Griffith Returns—McLaglen, La Hepburn and Miss Oberon’s Future,” *New York Times* (Sunday, May 10, 1936).

³⁵ Balio, *Grand Design*, 147. There was a significant gap between the salaries of actors. Only 54 actors earned \$100,000 or more that year. Given Oberon’s popularity in 1939 and earning potential, she would have likely fallen into this category.

³⁶ *Washington DC Star* (Dec. 10, 1946), Merle Oberon Papers, box 8-OS, “Scrapbook #11 1946-1947.”

³⁷ Elizabeth Ellis, “She Can Take It!” *Modern Screen* (May 27, 1935), 42, archive.org, accessed on Dec. 27, 2017.

³⁸ Glenn, *Female Spectacle*.

acting. More importantly, Oberon's large paychecks in combination with her public concern for making money helps to understand, if she were mixed race, her reason for passing as white.

Oberon's proclaimed whiteness rested on her own claims that she was born in Tasmania, which enabled her to cater to audiences' desires for an exotic narrative.³⁹ The exotic typically connoted a fascination for not only the racial Other but the distant and the primitive.⁴⁰ This correlated to the emerging fascination with the exotic in 1920s cinema that was a response to the Great Depression and enabled audiences to escape their lived reality through movies. Oberon fed into the demand for an exotic narrative by establishing her birthplace as Tasmania. In the *Portland Oregonian*, an interview quotes Oberon as explaining, "I was born in Tasmania, and most people think that is some place in China, but it happens to be one of the British islands off Australia."⁴¹ Oberon debunks the circulated public assumption that Tasmania was part of China. Yet she inaccurately asserts that Tasmania was still a British island. Previously called Van Diemen's Land, Tasmania was invaded by the British in 1803 and established a penal colony for housing British convicts. As a settler space, violence and foreign disease contributed to indigenous displacement and extermination, which most scholars recognize as the genocide of Aboriginal peoples through British colonialism.⁴² Although in 1901, it became part of the

³⁹ See her interviews in "Merle Oberon, Exotic British Star, Disclaims Glamour of Mystery," *Milwaukee Centennial* (Dec. 31, 1934), Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, "Scrapbook #6 1934-1935."; "Merle Oberon: Tasmanian who 'Knew Her When,'" *Era* (Feb. 21, 1934), Merle Oberon Papers, box 9-OS, "Scrapbook #2 1933-1934."

⁴⁰ Michael Richardson, *Otherness in Hollywood Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 68. See chapter four for specific film examples.

⁴¹ *Portland Oregonian* (July 7, 1935), Merle Oberon Papers, box 7-OS, "Scrapbook #8 1935-1936."

⁴² For more information on British colonization, Aboriginal displacement and genocide, the cultivation and culture of terror and violence in Tasmania see: Benjamin Madley, "From Terror to Genocide: Britain's Tasmania Penal Colony and Australia's History Wars," *Journal of British Studies*, 47.1 (Jan. 2008); Lyndall Ryan, "Massacre in the Black War in Tasmania 1823-34: A case study of the Meander River Region, June 1827," *Journal of Genocide Research* 10.4 (Dec.

Commonwealth of Australia, by Oberon's birth in 1911, there was still a significant British settler population. The confusion about who controlled Tasmania illustrates the general ignorance about that part of the world, at least by Hollywood. By positioning Tasmania as still a British colony, Oberon could also be strategically laying claim to an identity that was unquestionably white. Yet at the same time Oberon plays into this fascination for the exotic, positioning Tasmania as exotic when she explains that Tasmania is a place "where the wild men come from."⁴³ Audience demand for and understanding of the exotic was not site specific and represented any part of the world that was not considered the West. In other interviews Oberon claimed her birth location as merely "accidental" or "tricks-of-fate," highlighting her father's temporary post as a British soldier.⁴⁴ These remarks can be read as a type of rhetorical violence underpinned by colonialism in which calling Tasmania an "accidental" birthplace positioned settler colonialism as unintentional and unplanned by the British government. The depiction of Oberon's father's short visit also makes it seem as though his actions were innocuous. It downplays the long history of British occupation where British soldiers were intentionally sent to Tasmania with specific orders to colonize and conquer. Her father's station assignment in Tasmania was certainly no accident. Oberon's articulation of a Tasmanian homeland veils the real historical conditions of conquest, colonization, and indigenous violence (not to mention

2008); René Lemarchand, *Forgotten Genocides: Oblivion, Denial, and Memory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

⁴³ "Merle Oberon, Exotic British Star, Disclaims Glamour of Mystery," *Milwaukee Centennial*, (Dec. 31, 1934) Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, "Scrapbook #6 1934-1935."

⁴⁴ Virginia Lane, "Merle Oberon Wears Everything Well," in *Screen Book Magazine* (August 1935), Merle Oberon Papers, box 7-OS, "Scrapbook #8 1935-1936."; *Screen and Radio Weekly*. Aug. 11, 1935, Merle Oberon Papers, box 7-OS, "Scrapbook #8 1935-1936."

interracial mixing) in Tasmania to create a memory of a more sanitized space of white settlement with a hint of exoticism.⁴⁵

Newspapers and magazines were receptive to Oberon's public vocalization of an exotic white identity. Although published later in Oberon's career, *Life* magazine mentioned, "actually the nearest Asiatic thing about her was her birthplace, Tasmania, and she was born there only because the sun refuses to set anywhere without an Englishman on hand to bid it an understated good night."⁴⁶ Oberon's birth in Tasmania created a justification of her exoticism as it partially alleviated doubts of her racial difference through the acknowledgement of the wide expanse of the British imperial reach. Positioning British colonization as commonplace and penetrating like the sun, the article takes a more sympathetic tone by placing Oberon as a mere subject of the pervasive expanse of imperialism. In this way, the article recognizes colonialism but it is only whites that are portrayed. Oberon's claim to a white colonial identity based upon a "faraway" Tasmanian birth locale effectively allowed Hollywood's Production Code to mark her white and aided in the official production of Oberon's white identity.

Oberon's vocal distancing from exotic claims associated with China also illustrates how she sought to cultivate a particular type of exoticism, one that would not jeopardize her career or position as a leading white actress. In the 1930s and 1940s, the United States was developing a more positive image of China as they struggled against Japan. Missionary efforts and

⁴⁵ The penal colony functioned from 1803 to 1854. Shayne Breen, "Extermination, Extinction, Genocide British Colonialism and Tasmania Aborigines," in *Forgotten Genocides: Oblivion, Denial, and Memory*, ed. René Lemarchand (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, 2011). See also Angela Woollacott, *Settler Society in the Australian Colonies: Self Government and Imperial Control* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015); Henry Reynolds, *An Indelible Stain?: The Question of Genocide in Australia's History* (Ringwood: Penguin, 2001). They provide accounts of Tasmanian history and relationship between Aboriginal peoples and settlers.

⁴⁶ "Merle Oberon as George Sand," *Life*, 18.6 (Feb 5, 1945), 68-69.

sympathetic portrayals offered in Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth* also contributed to a greater acceptance and understanding of China.⁴⁷ However, particularly in Hollywood, the 1920s had firmly established Chinese characters as "primitive, slavish, exotic, manipulative, and amoral."⁴⁸ These qualities, if no longer explicit, were still likely in the minds of audiences. In contrast to the negative undertones present in being exotically Chinese, Tasmanian exoticism was untarnished in Hollywood and therefore could be presented without any implicit negative connotations.

While Oberon's white identity was predicated on the repeated rejection of being Eurasian, she simultaneously reinforced and propelled the allure of a Eurasian identity. In an interview published in *Screen and Radio Weekly* in May 1935, in responding to the rumor of being Eurasian, Oberon is quoted as saying, "what a pity I'm not! It would be so romantic."⁴⁹ In July, only a few months later, Oberon is quoted as saying, "at times I wish I were [...] It would be grand to be the only Eurasian actress in motion pictures. But the truth is—I'm not. I'm British—Irish."⁵⁰ Thus, even as Oberon emphatically asserted a white identity, she also expressed a longing to be Eurasian. Her words, "romantic" and "grand," point toward the refiguring of the stereotypical tragic Eurasian narrative within both Hollywood and society. Much like the "tragic mulatto" trope, Eurasian cultural depictions relied on the assumption that there was a need to hide their true racial identity, which ultimately prevented them from assimilating into the more "desirable" white culture and often resulted in death.⁵¹ Within 1930s

⁴⁷ Leong, *The China Mystique*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁴⁹ *Screen and Radio Weekly*, May 19, 1935, Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, "Scrapbook #7 1935."

⁵⁰ *Portland Oregonian*, July 7, 1935, Merle Oberon Papers, box 7-OS, "Scrapbook #8 1935-1936."

⁵¹ Marchetti, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril,"* 69. See also chapter 3 "Excursus on the 'Tragic Mulatto'; or, The Fate of a Stereotype," in Werner Sollors, *Neither Black nor White yet Both*

film, Eurasian characters were often depicted as the product of a white father and an Asian mother, typically illegitimate and therefore embodying “suspect morality” and “mysterious seductive sexuality.” Eurasian women were seen as either harmless and a “simple, passive object of spectacle” or “the agent of social havoc and moral ruin.”⁵² Beyond Hollywood depictions, Anglo-Indian Eurasians had been historically perceived as inferior to the British despite the proliferation of racial mixing between colonial men and Indian women. As early as the nineteenth century in India, Eurasians were stereotyped as “indolent,” “genetically inferior,” “inherently attracted to the fripperies of life” and were “gullible, timid, ill educated, [and] inarticulate.”⁵³ By the 1930s, they were positioned as having a higher status than Indians and occupying low-level government positions but were often seen as ostracized and marginalized from both Indian and British communities.⁵⁴

Positioning herself as a white star, Oberon used her privilege to counter traditional negative depictions of Eurasians as she posited their desirability—denying the rumors yet engaging their possibility. Within consumer culture, rumors are generally perceived as frivolous and trivial, and hold a negative connotation, akin to gossip or slander.⁵⁵ However, for women

(New York: Oxford UP, 1997). Blacks passing for white were typically depicted as “tragic,” “morally reprehensible,” or “morally inauthentic.”

⁵² Marchetti, *Romance and the “Yellow Peril,”* 71.

⁵³ C.J. Hawes, *Poor Relations: The Making of a Eurasian Community in British India 1773-1833* (Surrey, Curzon Press, 1996), 81-84.

⁵⁴ Alison Blunt, *Domicile and Diaspora: Anglo-Indian Women and the Spatial Politics of Home* (Malden: Blackwell, 2005).

⁵⁵ Gary Alan Fine and Patricia A. Turner. *Whispers on the Color Line: Rumor and Race in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 55. They define a rumor as “a claim about the world that is not supported by ‘authenticated information.’ It involves ‘unsecured,’ ‘unverified,’ information.” Kathleen A. Feeley and Jennifer Frost. “Introduction,” in *When Private Talk Goes Public: Gossip in American History*, eds. Kathleen A. Feeley and Jennifer Frost (New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 1. They are clear to differentiate between gossip and rumor. Rumor they contend is “a discrete piece of information or report, while gossip is

moviegoers and fans, the rumors they read in newspapers and fan magazines enabled the cultivation of a sense of community belonging and a type of connection to Hollywood stars.⁵⁶ Women consumed the rumors of Oberon. But instead of seeing women's consumption of these rumors as constraining, Oberon mobilized the rumors about her identity and molded it into an opportunity to imagine and express an alternative outcome for Eurasians—one that rested on theoretical embrace and desire. It was the *possibility* of being Eurasian that was important. This possible Eurasian identity made Oberon a more believable actor in films like *The Battle*, it enabled her to publicly assert a desirability of a Eurasian identity, and yet it could not confirm her as nonwhite and therefore it did not prevent her from gaining star status in Hollywood.

The Eurasian Marketplace

This possibility of Oberon as Eurasian became a desirable commodity within the changing “beauty culture” of women.⁵⁷ Modern advertising appeared in the late nineteenth century with the “first boom” in advertising in the 1920s as the United States market expanded beyond its shores and the introduction of photography was used in ads, with J. Walter Thompson largely steering the direction of the advertising field.⁵⁸ By the 1930s, the popularity and

more holistic, encompassing a range of conversational topics. Moreover, once a rumor is proven true, it is no longer a rumor; the same cannot be said for gossip,” 6.

⁵⁶ Jennifer Frost, *Hedda Hopper's Hollywood: Celebrity Gossip and American Conservatism* (New York: New York University Press, 2011). The popularity and desire to know more information about celebrity lives benefited the new field of gossip columnists, where women like Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons printed rumors, private scandals, and hearsay within the industry.

⁵⁷ Peiss *Hope in a Jar*, 6. Peiss uses the term “beauty culture” to describe the both the type of commerce and the changing systems of meaning that women encountered and which shaped their social experiences.

⁵⁸ Shalini Shankar, *Advertising Diversity: Ad Agencies and the Creation of Asian American Consumers* (Durham: Duke UP, 2015), 35.

economic force of Hollywood stars had extended beyond the film industry and included the use of stars in advertising. Oberon was no exception and had endorsements ranging from Shredded Wheat and Old Gold Cigarettes.⁵⁹ The Old Gold Cigarette advertisement that appeared in the *New York Times* on March 4, 1935 illustrates the heightened awareness of women's purchasing power and the increased publicity that stars received for their sponsorship. In the advertisement Oberon promotes the qualities of smoking Old Gold Cigarettes as well as the feminine enjoyment she receives from wearing an "Old Smoothie Hat." The ascending size of the advertising font demonstrates the importance placed first on Oberon as the star, then on her fashion choice of the hat, and finally on the product itself, Old Gold Cigarettes. Since hats were considered symbols of "casual elegance" for women and represented cutting edge fashion, the emulation of Oberon is the focal point of the advertisement that is catered toward a fashion forward female demographic.⁶⁰

Like other female stars, Oberon's image was heavily used for beauty product advertisements.⁶¹ Oberon's racial ambiguity, or ability to embody both the wholesome and the exotic onscreen, ensured a versatility of product marketing. For instance, Oberon's desirability as an exotic type aligns with what Sarah Berry calls "the glamour of exoticism" in which cosmetic companies, alongside the use of Hollywood female stars in their advertising, began utilizing makeup product descriptions that created a spectrum of beauty through euphemistic terms (like

⁵⁹ Shredded Wheat Ad (Circa 1934-1935) Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, "Scrapbook #6 1934-1935."

⁶⁰ Colleen Hill, "'Great Chic from Little Details Grows': Women's Accessories in the 1930s," in *Elegance in the Age of Crisis: Fashions of the 1930s*, eds. by Patricia Mears and G Bruce Boyer. (New Haven, Yale UP, 2014), 227.

⁶¹ Oberon also appeared in other ads. See "Duart permanent waves" *Hollywood*, 25.5 (May 1936), 36, archive.org, accessed on Dec. 27, 2017; "Lux toilet soap" *Hollywood*, 25.2 (February 1936), 19, archive.org, accessed on Dec. 27, 2017.

personalized colors or types) instead of racialized terms (like Chinese red) for their makeup in order to normalize difference.⁶² Despite the Production Code's policing of race onscreen, this new makeup terminology, Berry argues, signaled a shift in the priorities of cosmetic companies who sought to widen their female consumer demographic with the rise of more affordable cosmetics after World War I as well as the desire of studios to increase their profits by marketing multicultural characters in order to appeal to consumers in other countries beyond the United States.⁶³ Along with Oberon, Hollywood women with dark hair and features like Dolores Del Rio, Dorothy Lamour, Hedy Lamarr, and Rita Hayworth gained in popularity and importantly signified an expansion of beauty norms beyond "Northern European ideals."⁶⁴

The flexibility of Oberon's appearance enabled makeup to be marketed in ways that could represent the foreign while still deploying the naturalization of white beauty. Max Factor for instance, used Oberon as a way to sell lipstick palette. Max Factor's initial business in 1909 that provided makeup to Hollywood film and theater stars quickly expanded to a more general audience and used endorsements of stars to market their products.⁶⁵ A 1937 advertisement that featured Oberon offered women the ability to either become a "slightly unreal exotic" *or* a "beautiful, naturally charming beauty." Max Factor further proclaimed that by using this product, "you too may have still unrevealed depths of loveliness." The makeup palette offered the versatility to either enhance white natural beauty or create a "slightly unreal" and artificial ethnic

⁶² Sarah Berry, *Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 94.

⁶³ Berry, *Screen Style*, 95 & 117. In this way, Sarah Berry indicates that despite the studio's celebration of multicultural characters who looked "exotic" and who were bilingual (like Dietrich, Garbo, and Novarro) so they could perform in foreign language films, the studios economic interests were "somewhat at odds with the racist xenophobia of the 1930s America," 117.

⁶⁴ Berry, *Screen Style*, 102.

⁶⁵ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 126.

exoticism. In this way, the advertisement attempts to both naturalize whiteness and white beauty, but the suggestion that both looks produced “depths of loveliness” alongside Oberon’s image also points to the value of racial ambiguity and the popular trends. Oberon’s desirability was predicated upon her ability to achieve both a white and ethnic look.

However, Max Factor’s insistence that exoticism was constructed and whiteness was natural positions Oberon as naturally white, thereby negating Eurasian rumors, but also illustrates market logics at this time—the continued idealization of whiteness and the belief that only white women could participate in this type of cultural appropriation.⁶⁶ Could the makeup palette produce “depths of loveliness” and exoticism for nonwhite women consumers? Although nonwhite women were likely buying these products, it is clear they were not the primary demographic that Max Factor had in mind. Therefore, while cosmetic companies produced a façade of expanding beauty norms and multicultural attitudes, they perpetuated white privilege that was extended to both white Hollywood actors and white consumers. These discourses of beauty demonstrated that *being* Oriental or Eurasian was not valued in Hollywood while *looking* Eurasian was highly valued.

Makeup was perceived as having the power to conceal and temporarily transform women’s ethnic identity but it also resulted in the inability to properly classify Oberon. Instead, Oberon’s eyes were configured as the key to deciphering if she was or was not Eurasian. Her eyes also received the most attention in newspapers. Her eyes were, by and large, uniformly

⁶⁶ Berry, *Screen Style*, 112. The 1920s saw the most restrictive immigration laws such as the Cable Act (1922) revoking women’s citizenship if their husband could not be naturalized and the 1924 Immigration Act (Johnson-Reed Act). The 1930s followed suit while also being shaped by the Great Depression by curbing Mexican immigration under the presidency of Hoover and Filipino immigration under Roosevelt. See Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants since 1882* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2004).

described as “wide-set,” hazel and/or green, and beautiful.⁶⁷ Oberon’s performance in the *Scarlett Pimpernel* (1934) earned her the title of “slant-eye knock out” and also described her as “have the most devastating slant you ever saw [...]”⁶⁸ However, Oberon’s slanted eyes were a point of debate that some deemed as natural and others saw as artificially manufactured. One critic explained, “her hazel eyes are big and round. They’re not all slanted as they appear on the screen. That effect is achieved entirely with makeup.”⁶⁹ In an article that sought to disclose the “Real Secret of Beautiful Eyes,” the article claimed that “Merle Oberon grooms her lashes and brows in Oriental way, with brows arched and penciled, lashed heavily mascaraed.”⁷⁰ This implied that Oberon’s beautiful “Oriental” eyes were achievable through makeup and application techniques. Under the logics of commodity fetishism, her artificially slanted eyes were deemed desirable and resulted in a tangible increase in revenue for makeup companies. Oberon’s slanted eyes can be read as a fetish that both conceals and marks the skillful mastery of Oberon’s acting and racial performance to the point of racial indecipherability. Oberon’s slanted eyes debate thus reveal the intensity of white anxiety toward being unable to properly categorize and thus manage racial borders and bodies, but which Oberon exploited for her advantage.

The evocation of miscegenation (and the mixed race body) through Oberon and the public’s intense preoccupation with Oberon’s looks and beauty routine reflected the growing

⁶⁷ “She’s Okay, London!” *Chicago Movie Classic* (Feb. 1935). Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, “Scrapbook #6 1934-1935.”; “The Rise of Merle Oberon,” *Women’s Pictorial* (Dec. 22, 1934). Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, “Scrapbook #6 1934-1935.”

⁶⁸ “She’s Okay, London!” *Chicago Movie Classic* (Feb. 1935). Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, “Scrapbook #6 1934-1935.”; “Real Secret of Beautiful Eyes—Rest and Good Health,” Rochester, New York *Democrat Chronicle* (Apr. 7, 1935). Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, “Scrapbook #6 1934-1935.”

⁶⁹ “‘Reel’ Merle Oberon Differs from ‘Real’ Actress at Home,” *Grit*, Williamsport, PA, July 21, 1935, Merle Oberon Papers, box 7-OS, “Scrapbook #8 1934-1935.”

⁷⁰ “Real Secret of Beautiful Eyes—Rest and Good Health,” Rochester, New York *Democrat Chronicle* (Apr. 7, 1935). Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, “Scrapbook #6 1934-1935.”

market of women's beauty products vis-à-vis the film industry but also revealed how the beauty industry was an avenue that women could make money, gain independence, and achieve relative autonomy. For instance, gossip columnist Louella O. Parson suggested Oberon's "gold leaf makeup" that was used to achieve the Oriental look in *The Battle* was going to be patented and sold for general consumption by Oberon.⁷¹ This signaled a belief that her Oriental look was an economically viable idea that would make money if/when sold to the general public. Although a rumor, the patenting of cosmetics was popular, with women making money by selling cosmetics and seeking trademark protections through the United States Patent Office.⁷² As previously indicated, the popularity and public discourse of beauty products in the 1930s enabled women, beyond Oberon, to put on various identities that allowed for methods of self-expression and individuality and signaled a distancing from Victorian beauty and a shift toward being seen as a modern woman taking part in public life.⁷³ This was expressed as both consumers of beauty products but also as producers and distributors.

These beauty norms and opportunities for women in the beauty industry, while expanding, were still constrained by ideologies that privileged white beauty, a certain type of Asian beauty, and completely rejected black beauty. In *Hope in a Jar*, Kathy Peiss notes that an Armand ad declared a color palette for brunettes: "make her lips like pomegranates, her skin like pale ivory—she's Oriental, different and striking."⁷⁴ Calling attention to the "pale ivory" of the consumer's skin establishes Armand's desired demographic and also actively constructs a type of

⁷¹ *New York American* (Dec. 16, 1934), Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, "Scrapbook #6 1934-1935."; *Albany Times* (Dec. 9, 1934), Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, "Scrapbook #6 1934-1935."

⁷² Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 63. Peiss notes that between 1890 and 1924 there were at least 450 trademarks by women in regard to beauty products.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Armand advertisement, qtd. in Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 149.

colorism, which attached a higher value to light skin color and smooth skin. Colorism is most often analyzed in relationship to mixed race African Americans to show that lighter skinned African American women gained access to various resources, employment opportunities, higher income, and were perceived by their communities as more beautiful and attractive.⁷⁵ Colorism and the preference for light skin in Asian communities existed, though it did not always reflect a desire to be white but to embody East Asian characteristics.⁷⁶ Despite the new flexibility of beauty choices in the 1930s, colorism maintained a hierarchy of beauty based on skin tone. After describing Oberon's physical appearance and skin tone, one newspaper explained, "one might hesitate between the descriptive words Slavic and Mongolian. Certainly it is not Nordic. Also, certainly, it is beauty."⁷⁷ Like Oberon's eyes, Oberon's skin tone was a point of debate, with descriptions that ranged from "dark skinned" to a "warm, even brown" skin tone and were often followed by a difficulty to categorize her.⁷⁸

Not easily classified as white or nonwhite in skin tone, the look of Eurasian was undoubtedly perceived as beautiful but it was also a source of suspicion in Oberon's career. In the *London Sunday Graphic*, columnist Charles Graves extensively outlines Oberon's transformation within Hollywood:

Merle Oberon, between ourselves, has altered considerably in appearance. They have bleached her skin in Hollywood. They have also made her hair several shades lighter.

⁷⁵ Verna M. Keith, "A Colorstruck World: Skin Tone, Achievement, and Self-Esteem among African American Women," in *Shades of Difference Book: Why Skin Color Matters*, ed. Evelyn Nakano Glenn. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009), 26.

⁷⁶ Joanne L. Rondilla and Paul Spickard, *Is Lighter Better? Skin-Tone Discrimination among Asian Americans* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

⁷⁷ *Portland Oregonian* (Mar. 30, 1935), Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, "Scrapbook #7 1935."

⁷⁸ Sidney Skolsky, *Tampa Tribune*, Nov. 30, 1934, Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, "Scrapbook #6 1934-1935."; "The Rise of Merle Oberon," *Women's Pictorial*, Dec. 22, 1934, Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, "Scrapbook #6 1934-1935."

That is all part of grooming a star, and most of it is sheer nonsense. When Merle arrived in Hollywood she was wearing Schiaparelli's latest costume, Norman Hartnell's latest hat, and the only full-length chinchilla in California. But the cry went up, "Oh, this dowdy little Tasmanian girl." They made her wash her hair with henna shampoo. As I say, they bleached her skin—a process that must hurt like the devil. [...] This week you will see how they have changed her in "The Dark Angel."⁷⁹

Graves's expression of "between ourselves" illustrates the rumor-like quality of the information while taking on an almost ironic air of a private conversation. At first glance this rumor could be attributed to the use of whitening product itself. However, despite the rising fad in tanning, bleach creams were widely used by white women and were publicly spoken about with, by 1930, at least 232 bleach creams marketed to white women in order to appeal to notions of "gentility, social climbing, and Anglo-Saxon superiority."⁸⁰ Whitening products for white women were thought to erase troublesome dark spots and freckles and create an even and clear complexion. Therefore, perhaps it is not the use of whitening product that is the source of the controversial rumor but the implicit possibility that Oberon is not white. In doing so, Graves also decries the beauty process in general as his viewpoints reject the idea that women were positively transformed by these products. Instead, he articulates the malleability of appearance through beauty products as inauthentic.

If whitening creams and hair dye were signs of Oberon being inauthentically white, to others, makeup was a sign that Oberon was inauthentically, yet still possibly, Eurasian. In describing Oberon's role in *The Battle*, the *Los Angeles Times* explained that her makeup

⁷⁹ Graves, *London Sunday Graphic*, Sept. 22, 1935, Merle Oberon Papers, box 7-OS, "Scrapbook #8 1935-1936."

⁸⁰ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 149.

experimentation of “the gold dust did give a curious effect, something like ‘high-yaller.’”⁸¹ While the term “high-yaller” was typically used as a compliment for “mulatto” blacks, it also reinforced a color hierarchy that positioned “high-yaller” women as more desirable and beautiful than those with a dark complexion.⁸² In this way, language used to describe mulattos and mixed race African Americans was taken up in the description of Oberon and positions her as someone that is not white. The gold dust and the skin whitening illustrate Oberon as fabricating her whiteness even as it overtly demonstrates her fabrication as an Oriental character. In this sense, colorism was an instrument that was deployed in the management of Hollywood stars and in the cultural construction of western beauty ideals. Despite Oberon’s declarations of whiteness and the marketing of her desirable exotic look as framed through makeup, her white identity was taken as highly suspect and reinforced the values of colorism.

Although a beneficiary of the commodification of Eurasian beauty, at times Oberon publicly resisted the fetishization of her eyes and body. Oberon specifically expressed frustration with the press coverage that focused on her exotic look over her acting. In an article entitled “Merle Oberon’s Beautiful Eyes” in *The New Movie* magazine, Oberon is quoted as saying that she finds her eyes a drawback because as she notes, “I’d infinitely rather have the critics say ‘She gave a poor performance,’ or ‘She was splendid’ than ‘What exotic eyes!’ You see, the fact that my eyes screen well is no particular credit to me as an actress—care of the eyes and skillful make-up will do as much for any girl.”⁸³ Oberon’s interview sets up her exoticism as something

⁸¹ “Intriguing ‘Myths’ About Merle Oberon All Exploded,” *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 30, 1934, Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, “Scrapbook #6 1934-1935.”

⁸² Elspeth H. Brown, “The Commodification of Aesthetic Feeling: Race, Sexuality, and the 1920s Stage Model,” *Feminist Studies* 40.1 (2014), 93.

⁸³ “Merle Oberon’s Beautiful Eyes,” *The New Movie* (May 1935). Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, “Scrapbook #6 1934-1935.”

she crafted and fabricated through “skillful makeup,” which reinforces newspapers and fan magazines’ discourses on the commodifiability of racial ambiguity. It also draws attention to the fact that racial identity is seen as inextricably connected to the physical body.⁸⁴ Similarly to how Sadakichi Hartmann gets read as anarchist and Japanese through his hair, Oberon’s body became a site that provided clues for the viewer to identify her race. In challenging the decipherability of race while at the same time reinforcing the idea that racial codes could be read through the body, Oberon found a way to survive and thrive in an industry otherwise designed to consume the Other.⁸⁵

Hollywood Fashion and American Attire

In the same way that Oberon’s flexible racial identity allowed women consumers in the beauty industry to transgress racial borders through consumption of beauty products, Oberon’s flexible racial identity extended to a type of malleability of her body. Her rumored Eurasian identity was enhanced by fashion and as she became more established in Hollywood, a new American identity was read and signified by the clothes she wore. The 1920s saw an increase in American popular culture as connected to fashion trends due to the rise of chain stores and mass manufacturing that provided greater accessibility to American consumers.⁸⁶ In particular, many of those in power within Hollywood had started their career within the fashion industry, including United Artist producer Samuel Goldwyn. As a result, Hollywood included great

⁸⁴ Guterl, *Seeing Race in Modern America*.

⁸⁵ Ibid. He explains that the racial look is the “calculated assessment of the tone of the skin, or the texture of the hair, or the shape of the face” that produces a type of “faith in the eye’s capacity to discern racial difference,” 2-3.

⁸⁶ Berry, *Screen Style*, xii.

attention to the clothes that stars wore in film.⁸⁷ Fan magazines shared this enthusiasm, covering stars' costumes onscreen as well as their attire off-screen. Fan magazines depicted Hollywood fashion as a method of "self-invention" and "class transgression."⁸⁸ Hollywood's embrace of fashion was not meant to properly reflect social class but rather meant to exude the appearance of upper-class glamour, often in ways that matched the star's intended personality or persona. By the 1930s, a symbiotic relationship emerged—merchandise advertising by stars was coupled with strategic product placement within film along with fashion and clothing selection that was then made available in chain department stores.⁸⁹ This enabled women moviegoers to replicate the fashion found in films and provided an accepted type of "malleability of social identity."⁹⁰ In other words, women did not need to belong to upper-class society in order to wear clothes that gave the allure of a higher social class.

Beyond class, clothes enabled women, including Oberon, to freely imagine that they could transgress racial borders and this was endorsed through Hollywood fashion trends. For instance, eastern inspired fashion functioned both as an appropriate method of transgressive femininity, aligned with Oberon's early exotic persona, and fueled rumors of a Eurasian identity. As early as the seventeenth century, the epicenter of fashion, Paris, was finding inspiration from

⁸⁷ Other people who made began their career within the garment industry included Adolph Zukor, Marcus Loew, Carl Laemmle, William Fox, Louis B. Mayer, and Harry Warner. See Berry, *Screen Style*, xviii.

⁸⁸ Ibid. See also Jennifer Frost, *Hedda Hopper's Hollywood*. At a time when most extras wore their own clothes onscreen, gossip columnist Hedda Hopper's acting career was advanced through her purchase of expensive clothes that enabled her to play roles of higher-class women. As she transitioned to columnist, she was well known for her expensive and expansive collection of hats.

⁸⁹ Berry, *Screen Style*, 13.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 87.

the East.⁹¹ French textile companies began replicating Chinese, Japanese, and Indian patterns and colors. After the Russo-Japanese War, Paris fashion adopted the kimono sleeve within western designs.⁹²

Hollywood women's endorsement of fashion trends and designers helped to solidify these fashion trends. As the head designer for United Artists studio, Omar Kiam created Persian inspired designs that were worn by Oberon.⁹³ Specifically, Kiam's costumes from Oberon's film *Folies Bergere* (1934) were reproduced for sale at Saks Fifth Avenue.⁹⁴ The fusion of Oriental and Western fashion suited Oberon's Eurasian characterization and *Screen Book Magazine* exclaimed "the pajamas that Omar Kiam made her have a Chinese trend. The top might belong to a Manchu princess, but the trousers are definitely American."⁹⁵ As the *St. Louis Star Times* called it, the cut of lounging pajamas had a Persian feel while the "glamorous color of the Orient is woven into the metallic fabric which makes the dramatically flared top."⁹⁶ The attention to the intricacies of the construction and design illustrates the central emphasis was not on Oberon but on the clothes of the designer.

Oberon was not the only actress that promoted Eastern inspired attire, however, newspapers repeatedly aligned her racial identity by the clothes they saw her in. In *Screen Book Magazine*, after realizing that Oberon lived in India, interviewer Virginia Lane explains to

⁹¹ Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu, *The Beautiful Generation: Asian Americans and the Cultural Economy of Fashion* (Durham: Duke UP, 2011), 99.

⁹² Hoganson, *Consumer's Imperium*, 66.

⁹³ John T. McManus, "La Vinson on the Boulevard." *New York Times* (June 20, 1937).

⁹⁴ Berry, *Screen Style*, 15.

⁹⁵ Virginia Lane, "Merle Oberon Wears Everything Well," in *Screen Book Magazine* (August 1935). Merle Oberon Papers, box 7-OS, "Scrapbook #8 1935-1936." See also Carol Dyhouse, *Glamour: History, Women, Feminism* (New York: Zed, 2010). Dyhouse explains that pajamas represented a trendsetting fashion that was worn both in bed and on the beach, 15.

⁹⁶ *St. Louis Star Times* (March 11 1935), Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, "Scrapbook #6 1934-1935."

readers that she expected to see her “draped on a silken couch in one of those devastating Hindu costumes that everyone seems to be wearing—perhaps in a Nile-green chiffon *sari* banded with gold cloth” because “shouldn’t some of the exotic mystery of the Far East cling to her?”⁹⁷ Oberon’s connection to the East and the possibility of her Eurasian identity was tethered to her and expressed through her clothes. Moreover, the thick description that Lane uses to imagine Oberon caters to women’s consumption of these clothes, providing women readers with examples of the fabrics and colors that evoke exotic elegance. Oberon’s racialized body could be enhanced by fashion in ways that catered to women’s consumptive desires. Thuy Linh Tu shows that Asian American designers were emboldened by their ability to use their Asianness as a “fashionable commodity.”⁹⁸ Tu argues that this consumption of Asian fashion, while individually empowering for Asian and Asian American designers, cultivated an exoticism that was predicated upon a maintenance of difference (as opposed to intimacy) within the racialized and globalized fashion industry.⁹⁹ In a similar way, the ethnically ambiguous Oberon was able to participate in, help produce, and cultivate a type of exoticism within fashion. Undeniably these pressures were market driven—a convergence of American interests in the East, the growing amalgamation between Hollywood stars and advertising, and the understanding and desires of the New Woman.

Yet the market also saw Oberon’s body as merging the East and West and this conflation of difference was very much part of the appeal. When Lane finally meets Oberon she explains, “for an exotic, she [Oberon] was surprisingly costumed—in white flannel slacks and blue polo

⁹⁷ Lane, “Merle Oberon Wears Everything Well,” in *Screen Book Magazine* (August 1935). Merle Oberon Papers, box 7-OS, “Scrapbook #8 1935-1936.”

⁹⁸ Tu, *The Beautiful Generation*, 101.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

shirt, both with zipper fasteners. But maybe that is actually the most alluring type of woman. A woman who is charmingly feminine—even in white slacks—and has a whole unaffected way with her...” Lane’s explanation of Oberon as in “costume” illustrates the belief that, at least to Lane, Oberon’s western attire is one of temporary performance. Her acceptance that Oberon could be alluring and still exotic, through attitude and despite western attire, is hesitantly expressed. Instead it affirmed a type of anxiety that costumed performance of racial identity could be enacted beyond just white women. All women could be empowered, through clothes and makeup, in ways that could unsettle their racial or ethnic identities. Ben Pitcher argues in *Consuming Race* that consumption of cultural difference does not always equal imperialistic legacy, reduction in value, and a depletion of its authenticity.¹⁰⁰ Instead, he asserts that racial consumption has the potential to produce an “engagement, exchange, and negotiation where seemingly permanent or longstanding forms of identity and meaning are in actual fact the dynamic, contingent products of those processes.”¹⁰¹ Oberon can be read as helping to produce a type of flexible identity, one that capitalized on the consumption of the exotic but also served to value the fluid process of identity making, blurring the divide between racial anxiety and racial desire.

Beginning in the mid to late 1930s, Oberon’s branding shifted away from the exotic type and toward, as newspapers and magazines described, an “American” identity. This new American identity fit into the assimilation narrative of the United States and was largely manifested through Oberon’s onscreen roles and attire. Beyond advertisers and audience desire, the film industries often repackaged stars to maintain their freshness and appeal which helps

¹⁰⁰ Ben Pitcher, *Consuming Race*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), 37.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

explain Oberon's shift in personality type. Oberon's transformation from exotic to American is most evident in *The Cowboy and the Lady* (1938) a western romantic comedy where Oberon plays Mary Smith, the wealthy daughter of a politician who masquerades as a servant and falls in love with a rodeo cowboy named Stretch, played by Gary Cooper. The film offers a critique on aristocratic values and aligns American values with meritocracy and hard work, traits that are exemplified by Stretch. The film is inflected with multiple comedic scenes but ultimately propels the idea that love can transcend class differences by showing Mary's upper-class character decrease her social status and reject the lavish lifestyle she is accustomed in Washington DC (as the daughter of a lawyer who aspires to be a presidential candidate) in favor of simple farm life in Montana with Stretch. Mary is not explicitly labeled as white but her position as the potential President's daughter makes it unlikely to read her otherwise. Considered a "woman's film" because it centered on an adult female protagonist and was designed for female audiences in mind, *The Cowboy and the Lady* diverged from the stock formula by using fashion and attire in the film to denote Mary's class descent (as opposed to class ascent).¹⁰² Epitomizing upper-class glamour, the socialite Mary is initially described by her maids as a "cold fish," whose behavior would evoke fear in the cowboys they are trying to pursue. Mary class status is also evident in her attire. Early scenes show Mary trying to get Stretch to kiss her. Among other tactics, Mary decides to change into a "slinky" white dress. Made from silk or satin, these form-fitting dresses were popular in the 1920s and 1930s and serves to show Stretch, and the audience, Mary's physical beauty.¹⁰³ However, the last image we see of Mary, at the close of the film, is in more modest attire. Donning an apron, Mary dutifully transforms into the role as the down-to-earth

¹⁰² Balio, *Grand Design*, 235.

¹⁰³ Dyhouse, *Glamour: History, Women, Feminism*.

cowboy's wife. At the most basic level, the film illustrates the supreme value placed in costuming the characters to properly reflect the attitudes, values, and social position of each scene. Moreover, Mary's transformation within the film, in many ways, mirrors Oberon's transformation from aloof exotic persona to an "All-American" figure. Newspapers and fan magazines were quick to make this comparison and filmgoers commonly conflated stars' personalities with their onscreen characters.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, at close of 1935, Oberon was named among the top picks of "All-American" stars alongside Clark Gable, Shirley Temple, and Greta Garbo.¹⁰⁵ By playing a more wholesome American woman onscreen, Oberon came to be represented as American off-screen. The labeling of her as "American" also serves as a synecdoche for whiteness since her Americanization was not the result of naturalization or legal measures (she maintained a British nationality) but was enacted through the strategy of film choices and attire mirroring the tendency of women, particularly immigrant women to use fashion as a way to enact their Americanization.¹⁰⁶

Oberon's Americanness was signaled through her off-screen attire and behavior as well. *Harper's Bazaar's* article, "The Americanization of Merle" attributed all of Oberon's American identity directly to her attire. The article notes that when she first arrived to Hollywood "she learned to wear long gloves and long trailing dresses, to hold her head very high, to slink her eyes." This glamorous attire and implied haughty attitude soon relaxed into a "charming, jolly

¹⁰⁴ *Vanity Fair*, 1935, Merle Oberon Papers, box 7-OS, "Scrapbook #8 1935-1936."; Mary Biddle, "Beauty Advice," *Modern Screen*, Oct. 31, 1935:16; Mary Biddle, "Be Individual," *Modern Screen*, February 11, 1935: 22. See also Donald Kirihara's "Stereotype and Sessue Hayakawa," 92.

¹⁰⁵ *Los Angeles Examiner*, Dec. 29 1935, Merle Oberon Papers, box 7-OS, "Scrapbook #8 1935-1936."

¹⁰⁶ Hoganson, *Consumer's Imperium*, 61

girl, who loves to ride [horses] and to hike and wear comfortable clothes.”¹⁰⁷ Oberon’s embrace of casual wear was not atypical as other Hollywood female stars embraced pants, California beachwear, and outdoor leisurewear.¹⁰⁸ It also aligned with the ideologies of the modern woman, enabling more freedom with less restrictive clothes. The conflation between clothes and attitude, however, like in *The Cowboy and the Lady* is highlighted in *Harper’s Bazaar*, showing that the clothes women wore correlated to an attitude and race they were trying to achieve. While Oberon herself expressed nervousness for giving up her exotic look onscreen, she explained that doing so was “being myself” and “forced me to act a character honestly, to rely on my sincerity in a role rather than in tricks of exoticism.”¹⁰⁹ Exotification of her early onscreen characters and off-screen persona is, in this instance, framed by both the media and Oberon as inauthentic and insincere. In contrast, with this new American persona, Oberon was described as more “natural,” youthful, and “wholesome” and fit with the assimilating ideologies of the United States during the 1930s. The embrace and Americanization of other actresses like Colleen Moore (Irish), Pola Negri (Polish), and Hedy Lamarr (Austrian), “worked to guarantee versions of ethnicity that rationalized its renunciation by assimilated Americans.”¹¹⁰ Like rumors about Oberon’s perceived Eurasian identity, Oberon’s American identity was not a self-imposed label but a product of external forces within the film and fashion industry that was cemented by circulated discourses that found value in the marketing potential of her body. Oberon could be perceived as

¹⁰⁷ “The Americanization of Merle,” *Harper’s Bazaar*, Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, “Scrapbook #7 1935.”

¹⁰⁸ Berry, *Screen Style*, 154. Female stars like Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, Ina Claire, and Katharine Hepburn were particularly fond of pants.

¹⁰⁹ Ernest Lenn, “Charles Boyer Scores Hit in United Film,” *San Francisco Call* (May 25, 1935). Merle Oberon Papers, box 6-OS, “Scrapbook #7 1935.”

¹¹⁰ Diane Negra, *Off-White Hollywood: American Culture and Ethnic Female Stardom* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 18.

possibly Eurasian in fashion forward Eastern inspired clothing or she could be perceived as white by wearing “American” clothes.

Transnational Cultural Memories of Oberon

Stars like Oberon served as a reflection of American values for the nation and the rest of the world, but they also appealed to growing international audiences. With European film companies still recovering from World War I, United States companies began expanding their marketing demographics and looked outward from Hollywood to the rest of the world. By 1921, Oberon’s affiliated studio, United Artists, had set up foreign distribution subsidiaries in places like Australia and many parts of Europe.¹¹¹ The worldwide popularity of Oberon as a Hollywood film star was coupled with the fact that the burgeoning market in Australia had a connection to the actress. For instance, both local Tasmanian and Australian news stories claimed Oberon, often using “Tasmanian,” “Australian,” and “British” interchangeably in their newspaper headlines.¹¹² After the release of *The Battle* (1934), the Hobart *Mercury* (the place of Oberon’s own proclaimed birth) printed the headline “Tasmania is proud of you. . . .MERLE OBERON.”¹¹³ The writer’s use of “you” suggests that Oberon would (or might) read her hometown newspaper. This embrace of Oberon can also be read as a public expression of love and admiration from the Tasmanian community. The claiming of Oberon also resulted in claims of familial belonging. As early as December 1933, The Hobart *Mercury* published an article that claimed that Ex-Senior Constable, R.J. Thompson, had lost contact with his daughter four years ago when she moved to

¹¹¹ John Sedgwick and Michael Pokorny eds., *An Economic History of Film* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

¹¹² Angela Woollacott, *Race and the Modern Exotic: Three ‘Australian’ Women on Global Display* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2011).

¹¹³ Qtd. in Woollacott, *Race and the Modern Exotic*, 115.

mainland Australia.¹¹⁴ When he saw Oberon's photograph, "he was instantly struck with the resemblance she bore to his daughter" including the acknowledgement by Oberon that her birth name was Estelle Thompson. The article concludes by saying, "in view of the fact that the cablegram states definitely that Merle Oberon is a Tasmanian-born girl, that there is a distinct similarity in the names and in appearance, and that no one except Mr. Thompson in Tasmania has claimed relationship with the young film star, it seems quite likely that she is actually Elsie Thompson."¹¹⁵ Oberon denied the familial relationship. She stated in 1934, "I don't want a lot of people claiming me. My own father is dead. I have no intention of returning to Australia, but who can be certain of what the future holds? I am a great believer in fate."¹¹⁶ Her refusal to provide specific details of her past, however, propelled these rumors. For Tasmanian and Australian fans, Oberon connected them across the ocean to Hollywood and represented the possibilities of transnational intimacies. However, Oberon's deliberate fashioning of racial ambiguity was enacted through a vague storytelling about her past and which enabled a transnational presence that was carefully managed by Oberon herself.

The management of Oberon's national and racial identity was controlled by Oberon throughout her life, however, with her death was a loss of the ability to control these stories. Importantly, the ambiguity that Oberon capitalized upon and open-endedness of the rumors that propelled her career, enabled communities to continue to claim her, adjusting her racial identity in ways that fit their political and social interests. It was not until four years after her death that

¹¹⁴ "Noted Film Star," *The Mercury*, Hobart: 1860-1954 (Dec. 13, 1933), Trove Digital Newspapers, National Library of Australia. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article24897077>, accessed Dec. 27, 2017.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ "Merle Oberon: Tasmanian who 'Knew Her When,'" *Era* (Feb. 21, 1934). Merle Oberon Papers, box 9-OS, "Scrapbook #2 1933-1934," Box 9-OS.

Higham and Mosley located Oberon's birthplace as India.¹¹⁷ According to Higham and Mosley, Tasmania was a fabrication by Oberon and director Alexander Korda that was used to ensure a believable but less traceable birthplace. When it came out that Oberon had no connection to Tasmania or Australia, new stories suddenly emerged that instead positioned her as the illegitimate child of Lottie Chintock, a Chinese chambermaid at a hotel in a small town of Welborough in northern Tasmania.¹¹⁸ Several versions of this rumor are traced within Maree Delofski's documentary entitled *The Trouble with Merle*. Within the documentary, some Tasmanian residents claim that she was born to a British soldier. Others say she was born to the hotel owner, J.W. Thompson. There are also varying stories of how Oberon traveled to India, which include being taken by a theater troupe called Obrien or adopted by an Indian silk merchant at a young age. The death of Oberon enabled a new cultural memory, one that was oppositional to official historical discourses.¹¹⁹

By tracing the rumors of Oberon's mixed race identity to contemporary Tasmania, it becomes evident that the ambiguity of Oberon functioned as a tool to empower, claim, and build community, even after her death. A major influx of Chinese immigration in Australia occurred during the nineteenth century.¹²⁰ In Tasmania, Chinese early immigrants were tin miners in

¹¹⁷ Oberon died in 1979. See Higham and Mosely, *Princess Merle*.

¹¹⁸ Cassandra Pybus, *Till Apples Grow on an Orange Tree* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1998). See also *The Trouble with Merle*, dir. Maree Delofski; Maree Delofski, "Storytelling and Archival Material in *The Trouble with Merle*." *The Moving Image*, 6.1 (Spring 2006); Maree Delofski, "Place, Race, and Stardom," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*. 26.6 (Dec. 2012).

¹¹⁹ Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the Aids Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 5.

¹²⁰ C.Y. Choi, *Chinese Migration and Settlement in Australia* (Sidney: Sidney UP, 1975), xii. Choi argues that the immigrant experience of Australian Chinese is similar in many respects to the United States. Charles A. Price, "Foreword," in *Chinese Migration and Settlement in Australia*, C.Y. Choi. (Sidney: Sidney UP, 1975); John Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie: Chinese Australians in White Australia* (Sidney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007).

regions like Welborough (where Oberon was said to be born) and now constitute the largest group of non-European immigrants in modern day Tasmania.¹²¹ They arrived in order to meet the demand of labor, first in small numbers, and then as immigration rates grew, legislation and restrictive measures were implemented as a racist mechanism for disempowerment, disenfranchisement, and dehumanization. In 1901 and lasting until 1958, Australia, heavily influenced by the United States and Roosevelt's embrace of eugenics, restricted "undesirable" immigrant groups and in an effort to propagate a more "healthy stock" of the white race instituted a dictation test which, although not explicitly stated to exclude nonwhite immigrants, was intended to do just that.¹²² Institutionalized racism precluded Chinese migrants from being seen as part of the nation.¹²³ Despite intimate relationships between racial groups, official government policy and cultural attitudes against Chinese in Australia functioned to maintain a powerful White Australia and produce the façade that Australia was homogenously white.¹²⁴ The claim and desire that a Chinese immigrant laboring population was responsible for producing Tasmania's great female star recovers the obscured history of a Chinese diaspora in Tasmania,

¹²¹ Vivian Whole, "Tasmania's Chinese Heritage: An Historical Record of Chinese Sites in North East Tasmania" (M.A. thesis. University of Tasmania, 1985).

¹²² Marilyn Lake, "Lowe Kong Meng Appeals to International Law: Transnational Lives Caught Between Empire and Nation," in *Transnational Lives*, ed. Desley Deacon, Penny Russell, and Angela Woollacott (London: Palgrave, 2009). This test required that immigrant applicants write a fifty-word passage in any European language. Australia's national sovereignty thus relied on a system of exclusion that largely targeted Japanese, Chinese, and Indian immigrants, 226. While Chinese and Asian immigration had been severely restricted in Australia, the small population that did exist were viewed as a threat to whites and were positioned as invading Australia's "empty" land (which was not empty, of course, but used as justification of the removal of lands from Aborigines).

¹²³ Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie*, 36. This was despite the fact they played integral roles as both laborers and merchants in the nation's development. Fitzgerald also notes that Chinese-Australian were tied to Fiji and "handled between a half and three-quarters of all bananas ripened and traded in Australia over the first quarter of the twentieth century," 156.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

dismantles the historical image of a White Australia, and punctures the myth of a community that desires a white Australian genealogy.

In *The Trouble with Merle*, for instance, Peter Lawrence is interviewed and he claims to be the cousin of Oberon. He explains, “my mother didn’t tell me ‘till 1994 that I had Chinese blood. I’m so proud now to be part of the family.”¹²⁵ The word “now” implies a perceived history of shame of being Chinese and having Chinese ancestry.¹²⁶ This celebratory narrative fits with the newly adapted multiculturalism and government policy toward recognizing the history of minority groups in Australia. Australia’s official multicultural policies attempted to embrace and support the cultural diversity of Australia and were specifically targeted to better incorporate Asians and Jews who were previously perceived as inassimilable.¹²⁷ Around the same time (1972) Australian diplomatic relationship with China normalized to produce a growth in economic trade between the two countries. The bilateral relationship between China and Australia makes it easier to understand the widespread circulation and acknowledgement of the rumor of Oberon as mixed race Chinese. As cultural memory, Oberon was used by the Chinese community as a way to gain national visibility and a demand for recognition as part of the national body politic. If Oberon’s self-declared birth story correlated with the script of White Australia in the 1930s, the community driven cultural memory of Oberon as Chinese correlated with the newer script of multicultural Australia in the late twentieth century.

¹²⁵ *The Trouble with Merle*, dir. Maree Delofski.

¹²⁶ Marilyn Lake, “Lowe Kong Meng Appeals to International Law,” 226.

¹²⁷ Elsa Koleth, “Multiculturalism: A Review of Australian Policy Statements and Recent Debates in Australia and Overseas.” Parliament of Australia (October 8, 2010), http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1011/11rp06#_Toc275248120, accessed Dec. 27, 2017. See also chapter 1 in Ali Rattansi, *Multiculturalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011); Woollacott, *Settler Society in the Australian Colonies*. Australia and Canada’s implementation of its multicultural agenda was used as a framework for other nations, including the United States.

Oberon's contemporary cultural memory was taken up by marginal and peripheral communities as a way to gain national visibility and recognition while simultaneously critiquing the historical attitudes and actions of a White Australia. Yet, unlike Oberon, who managed her rumors strategically and calculatingly, it is never the actual Chinese community that speaks. With the exception of Peter Lawrence in *The Trouble with Merle*, the privileging of Lottie Chintock's story is mediated through newspapers. The coalescing of Oberon's birth story with Lottie Chintock sharply illustrates the ways in which rumor is gendered, crosses oceans and connects colonial transits, and yet is limited in power.

Conclusion

As a famous Hollywood actress, the ways in which Oberon is perceived and remembered is imbued with political meaning. Oberon never once claimed that she was mixed race (either Anglo-Indian or part-Chinese). Yet as fan magazines and film performances of Oberon in the 1930s show, the prevalence of whiteness was both reinforced and undermined by the very rumors of a mixed race identity and the evocation of Eurasian desirability. The contemporary remembering of Oberon also generates a celebration and recuperation of racial mixing, forcing a reckoning of the historic presence of Chinese immigrants in Australia and Tasmania while it illuminates the economic and political incentivized system that supported these rumors. The rumors of Oberon's identity have played, perhaps, a more powerful role than the "truth" would have: they empowered Oberon as an agent to, at times, push against the racialized and gendered norms of her time, which was enabled by the rapidly changing consumer culture of women.

However, the power that Oberon exercised through her participation in consumer culture had limitations. It did not change the fact that the objectification of women and women's bodies

were maintained and exacerbated by the growth in advertising and celebrity culture. It did not encourage women's involvement in politics. In fact, "advertising collapsed the emphasis on women's range and choice to individual consumer," Nancy Cott argues, which as a consequence "disarmed Feminism's challenges in the guise of enacting them."¹²⁸ Instead, Oberon's body, as controversially mixed race, helped to produce the standards of what Eurasian should look like—ambiguous, indecipherable, exotically beautiful, and familiar yet foreign.

¹²⁸ Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1987).

Chapter 4

Mixed Race and the Politics of Performer Bardu Ali in Black Entertainment

In season one, episode three of the popular 1970s sitcom *Sanford and Son* titled “Here Comes the Bride, There Goes the Bride,” the main character Fred Sanford and his son, Lamont Sanford, head to church for Lamont’s wedding to his fiancée, Crystal. In contrast to the City Hall location that Fred had suggested, Lamont explains that Crystal, who works a window at the post office, wants a church wedding. Her position at the post office and her desire to have a church wedding signifies a type of black, middle-class respectability. During the discussion, Lamont’s earnest comment about being a “lousy junk dealer who is over thirty” and “marrying up” is set in stark contrast to Fred’s response toward Crystal’s family whom he describes as a “bunch of jive niggers.”¹ However, after Crystal is escorted down the aisle by her father she suddenly decides that she does not want to marry Lamont. Commotion ensues and Crystal flees the church, with Lamont chasing closely behind (figure 3.1). The class difference is clear in this scene, as both Lamont and Fred acknowledge, albeit differently, that they are of lower class in comparison to Crystal and her family.

Irreconcilable difference, in this clip, was not based not upon a difference in race but rather upon a difference in social class. The show, set in 1970s Watts, California, depicted poor and working-class black families, and frequently mentioned the racial conflicts between blacks and whites and the riots that had just occurred.² It garnered millions of weekly views and a

¹ Sanford and Son, “S01 E03 Here comes the bride, there goes the bride,” YouTube, posted by “Testing Network,” Oct. 17, 2017, accessed on Oct. 30, 2017.

² Jared Sexton, “More Serious than Money: On *Our Gang*, *Diff’rent Strokes*, and *Webster*,” in *African Americans on Television: Race-ing for Ratings*, eds. David J. Leonard and Lisa Guerrero (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2013), 92.



Figure 3.1 Screenshot of Bardu Ali as Crystal's father in *Sanford and Son*, "Here comes the bride, there goes the bride," S01 E03, Jan. 28, 1972, YouTube, accessed Dec. 27, 2017

diverse audience demographic. It often aligned the audience with Fred's character, a junkyard dealer, whose "tell it like it is," lovable but irascible attitude correlated with a type of black authenticity that was often linked to larger associations with "primitivism and anti-intellectualism" and spoke to the "belief that black economic mobility necessarily breeds assimilationists and race traitors because of interracial mixing."³ The show constructed blackness as "authentic" when associated with working-class blacks like Fred, while it positioned middle-class blacks like Crystal's father as less authentic, signified by his physical timidity and lack of masculine aggression.⁴ Yet while the character of Crystal's father was constructed as less

³ E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003), 23.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

authentic because of his class status, the actor who played Crystal's father, Bardu Ali, was embraced by the black community, as evidenced by his ongoing popularity and long career in black entertainment. Ali's black identity was clearly articulated through newspapers in his off-screen (and behind-the-scenes) roles within black television, despite the fact that he was mixed race, born to a Bengali father and an African American mother.

In the context of the 1970s, the perception of Ali as black was a reflection of rising black nationalism, the growth of black entertainment in music, television, and film, and the changing racial discourses that reflected black racial pride and empowerment within the United States. Yet to represent Ali as unambiguously black was a new strategy for both mainstream and black newspapers in the 1960s. The racialization of Ali shifted throughout his career of over fifty years in vaudeville, jazz, rhythm and blues, and television. This chapter traces Ali's career and the racialization of his identity, foregrounding two pivotal moments. The first examines the 1960s and 1970s, arguing that Ali's engagement within the television industry was predicated upon the media's framing of Ali through the lens of a black, masculine identity. Newspapers framed Ali as a black man, often in ways that silenced black women voices and diminished their agency. Newspaper depictions of Ali's romances with various women throughout his life also signaled his racialization more clearly since these women's racial identities informed the way that Ali was racially represented. Newspaper depictions of his marriages with black women, Margaret Caree and then Vivian Harris, for instance, worked to reinforce Ali's blackness. Newspapers also articulated Ali's marriage and business partnership with Mexican American woman Tila Ali, demonstrating that intimacies were not only individualized acts of love but also followed the legacies of an imperial logic—enabling cross racial relationships to foster that were also based

on economic decisions and that built business partnerships.⁵ The public depictions of his intimate relationships in print media showcase how Ali's racial identity was made intelligible through his relationships with women.

The chapter then shifts to show that in the earlier part of Ali's career, newspapers highlighted his mixed race identity, enabling him to capitalize on exoticism and Orientalism (as did Hartmann, Eaton, and Oberon). The 1920s corresponded to the rise of Orientalism and the consumption of the Orient, even within the African American community and particularly within the space of Harlem, where Ali spent the earlier part of his career. Writers and cultural artists framed Harlem a site that was exotic and cosmopolitan, and enabled an accommodation of a mixed race identity.⁶ This mixed race identity could be a spectacle to consume, a subjectivity to embody, and/or a rationale for patrolling race and racial borders.⁷

Ali held a firm footing in various black cultural circuits.⁸ His life took him from an early childhood in New Orleans to New York and the east coast in the 1920s and 1930s. New Orleans likely offered Ali the first introduction to jazz music, as many Bengali African American mixed race families lived in neighborhoods near brothels and saloons that were "full of music: particularly ragtime and the evolving style that would become jazz."⁹ Ali would then make his way to Harlem. Once in New York, Ali performed as a bandleader and musician in places like the Apollo Theater and the Harlem Opera House, where he was listed as one of Harlem's most

⁵ Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*.

⁶ Ngô, *Imperial Blues*, 13.

⁷ Ngô, *Imperial Blues*, 22.

⁸ See Bald, *Bengali Harlem* for a depiction of Ali's family and other families that were part of the thriving Bengali African American communities.

⁹ Bald, *Bengali Harlem*, 69.

popular and “youthful” emcees and the “King of Jesters.”¹⁰ He was also a staple in Chick Webb’s orchestra with Ella Fitzgerald.¹¹ And in 1934, he performed with Lew Leslie’s *Blackbirds*, a black revue that toured in Europe.¹² By the 1940s, he had traveled to Los Angeles, where he co-owned the *Barrelhouse*, a Rhythm and Blues nightclub where sawdust graced the floor with displayed artwork by co-owner Johnny Otis, and the audience interacted by “finger-popping” to the music.¹³ Around 1967 or 1968, Ali was managing tap dancer Harold Nicholas of the Nicholas Brothers, which led him to meet Redd Foxx and begin to manage Foxx’s career; a move that would catapult both of them into black television.¹⁴

Given his embeddedness within the forms, spaces, and trends of black entertainment, it would be easy to simply classify Ali as black, a description and identity that fits with the rule of hypodescent, or the one-drop rule. This was a cultural and legal definition established in the early twentieth century in the United States, with cultural antecedents that went as far back as the colonial period, which held that any person with African ancestry was considered black.¹⁵ The one-drop rule was used as justification for white supremacy and the maintenance of the economic, social, and political disenfranchisement of African Americans. By the 1920s, it was

¹⁰ Allan McMillan, “Theatre Chat,” *Afro-American* (Feb. 3, 1934), 20; “Bardu Ali to Head Unit for Fanchon-Marco,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, *Pittsburg*, PA. Apr. 7, 1934; “Bardu Ali a New York Sensation,” *The Chicago Defender*, Mar. 31, 1934, 9.

¹¹ “To Headline Bronzeville Ball,” *Chicago Defender*, October 7, 1939, 20.

¹² Theatre Correspondent, “Show Packed with Talent: Fine Singing in ‘Blackbirds,’” undated, Delilah Jackson Papers, collection 923, box 22, folder 27, Stuart A. Rose Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA.

¹³ Lipsitz, *Midnight at the Barrelhouse*, xxv.

¹⁴ Michael Seth Starr, *Black and Blue: The Redd Foxx Story* (Milwaukee: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 2011).

¹⁵ G. Reginald Daniel, *More than Black: Multiracial Identity and the New Racial Order* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2002), xi. African Americans were the “targets of the longest-standing and most restrictive rule of hypodescent, which has not only denied them the power to choose how to describe their racial identity but has ensured that their African American ancestry is passed down in perpetuity,” 13.

well established in the United States. While the one-drop rule was an oppressive and racist mechanism, this chapter shows how the one-drop rule was unevenly imposed onto mixed race people like Ali. Indeed, it was precisely Ali's racial ambiguity that enabled him to circumvent the racial impositions of the one-drop rule through depictions of him as slightly yet "exotically" Oriental. Moreover, in the latter part of his life, the black community used the one-drop rule to their advantage, claiming Ali as a black cultural figure within the black community (in contrast to being mixed race).

This chapter sees Ali's racial identity as weaving between black and Asian at different moments in history, gesturing to the work of AfroAsian scholarship and its mapping of AfroAsian histories and solidarities.¹⁶ AfroAsian scholarship emerged in response to the 1960s rhetoric that pitted Asian American advancement against African Americans, presuming animosity and competition between these groups. AfroAsian scholarship as a field is a contemporary and historical investigation of the relationship between African Americans and Asian Americans that examines Asian American identity "in terms of a polymorphous, multifaceted, multiply-raced immigration diaspora in combination with the histories of the African slave diaspora."¹⁷ It attempts to shift the perspective from a system of racial hierarchy to

¹⁶ Following Raphael-Hernandez, Steen, Prasad, and Okihiro, I use the term AfroAsian, without the hyphen as a way to "denote a unique, singular set of cultural dynamics that our authors analyze." See Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen, "Introduction," in *AfroAsian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics*, eds. Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen (New York: New York UP, 2006), 2. See also Bill V. Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Helen H. Jun, *Black Orientalism and Asian Uplift from Pre-Emancipation to Neoliberal America* (New York: New York UP, 2011); Vijay Prasad, *Everyone was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2008).

¹⁷ Raphael-Hernandez and Steen, *AfroAsian Encounters*, 4.

a system of solidarity, and has the “potential ability to disrupt the black/white binary that has so persistently characterized race and ethnic studies.”¹⁸

An analysis of Ali illustrates the very different conversations that surrounded black/Asian multiraciality, particularly compared to Asian/white multiraciality. Michele Elam explains that her attention to blackness in mixed race is due to the fact that “not only does blackness have a distinct, powerful, and troubled status within the study of mixed race, but it continues to have one, intractably, within broader U.S. racial politics.”¹⁹ Jared Sexton notes that blackness, even seen through a lens of multiracialism, is always connected to the history of slavery and its sexual relations, as well as more recent associations with “welfare state” policies.²⁰ These specific histories have contributed to the growing dichotomy between black/nonblack within the United States racial landscape. As nonblack, Asian/white intermixing has been sutured to traditional assimilationist narratives. For instance, in the late twentieth century, there was a dramatic rate of out-marriage of Asians. The increase of Asian groups marrying whites garnered a perception of Asian assimilation into American culture. Furthermore, the “U.S. government and military involvement in Asia throughout the twentieth century has produced a continuous flow of multiracial Asian American births.”²¹ The facilitation of Asian/white multiracials through United States empire-building has been typically framed in the context of a salvation narrative, furthering the perceived assimilatory potential of Asian countries in which the United States militarily intervenes. Asian/white multiracials thus have been more visible and more accepted,

¹⁸ Ibid., 3.

¹⁹ Elam, *The Souls of Mixed Folk*, 23.

²⁰ Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes*, 17.

²¹ Teresa Williams-León and Cynthia L. Nakashima, “Reconfiguring Race, Rearticulating Ethnicity,” in *The Sum of Our Parts: Mixed-Heritage Asian Americans*, eds. Teresa Williams-León and Cynthia L. Nakashima (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2001), 5.

creating a relative ease in discussing Asian/white intermixing. This chapter diverges from the previous three chapters to focus on Asian/black intermixing. Although Asian/black intermixing has not been as visible as Asian/white intermixing, these communities have survived and thrived under the historically shifting racial order of the United States

Tracing the AfroAsian routes and connections in Ali's life also uncovers the longer history of colonialism, black slavery, Asian trade settlement and immigrant labor, and the broader conditions that led to these intimacies and racial mixing.²² Building from scholarly work on intimacies of empire, my study of Ali demonstrates how "intimacies of desire, sexuality, marriage, and family are inseparable from the imperial projects of conquest, slavery, labor, and government."²³ It also reveals the ways that these intimacies have a continual residue that are mapped and reflected, at different moments, through the racialization of Ali.

Vivek Bald's *Bengali Harlem* traces Ali's father to one of the first waves of Bengali peddlers, constituted by south Asian men who began immigrating to the United States as early as the 1880s.²⁴ Bengali Muslim peddlers, or "Hindoo" peddlers as newspapers described them, were opportunistic in their ability to conduct business on the "thin edge between Indophilia and xenophobia—they arrived at a time in which fantasies of and goods from India were valued, even as immigrants from the subcontinent and other parts of Asia were being vilified, attacked, and excluded."²⁵ They recognized the enthusiasm for the consumption of "oriental" goods and began to bring Indian and other "oriental" items to the United States to sell on the east coast.²⁶ In response to the influx of immigrants from the region, legal restrictions were set in place, which

²² Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*.

²³ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁴ Bald, *Bengali Harlem*, 7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

positioned Indians as both “undesirable” and as “permanent outsiders.”²⁷ However, these men began to settle in places like Harlem and New Orleans and intermixed with Creole, African American, and Puerto Rican women as a way to anchor themselves in communities and continue their work in the United States.²⁸ Bardu’s father, Moksad Ali, was 29 years old when he married Ella Elizabeth Blackman (24 years old) in 1895 in New Orleans.²⁹ Moksad was married prior to Ada Wallace for three years before marrying Blackman when Blackman was seven months pregnant with their first child. Ella and Moksad had eight children together.³⁰

Although the circumstances of the relationship between Moksad and Ella were unclear, for many Bengali peddlers, intimate relationships with both local women of color and Bengali women became crucial components to their economic success. For instance, Bengali women were responsible for producing the “embroidered goods” that would then be taken by these men and sold in the United States. These men often maintained homes and families in the villages in India in addition to homes and families they created in New Orleans. And in New Orleans, Creole women, provided the “stability and longevity” to local networks that were also essential for these men’s businesses.³¹ AfroAsian interactions were made possible through trade routes, facilitated by the end of the slave trade that created a gap in laborers. As a result, Indians were sent to South Africa, Chinese to the Caribbean, and Asians to the United States.³² Ali’s family

²⁷ Ibid., 2.

²⁸ Ibid., 8. The United States barred Indians from immigration in 1917 and which culminated in the 1923 Supreme Court decision that prevented East Indian naturalization. In 1923, Bhagat Singh Thind attempted to argue that intermarriage between Indian and Europeans meant that Indians in the United States should be classified as white. However, the Supreme Court declared that immigrants of Indian origin could not become naturalized Americans. See also Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*.

²⁹ Bald, *Bengali Harlem*, 74.

³⁰ Ibid., 81.

³¹ Ibid., 8.

³² Raphael-Hernandez and Steen, *AfroAsian Encounters*, 6.

history shows the connections between African American communities and Asian immigrants and the establishment of intimate coalition building that occurred through these trade routes.

These coalitions did not unfold easily. Most Asian immigrants faced a type of triangulated racial reality where, while whites saw them as nonwhite, they did not see themselves as aligned with blacks because they migrated as free laborers and not as slaves. Blacks also did not seek a coalition with Asians because they perceived Asian immigrants as having more opportunity compared to blacks.³³ Despite these optics, Ali's family illustrates the existence of AfroAsian interconnections that challenged the racial hierarchies that whites attempted to impose. These links between racial groups were embedded in Ali's genealogy but, by the 1970s, had become largely invisible in favor of a politicized black identity.

The Solidification of a Masculine Black Identity

It was *Sanford and Son* that linked Ali to a black identity. Airing in January 1972 as a midseason replacement for another show, *Sanford and Son* soared in popularity. It ranked sixth in its premier year and remained in the top ten of primetime network shows until it ended in 1977.³⁴ The show used black vernacular comedy and catered to black interests and audiences without alienating white viewers.³⁵ Ali was not just an extra in *Sanford and Son*. As Redd Foxx's manager he was a central feature in the production and support of one of the first African

³³ Ibid., 5.

³⁴ Kathleen Fearn-Banks and Anne Burford-Johnson, *Historical Dictionary of African American Television* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 411. Foxx even won a Golden Globe for best television actor in a comedy in 1973. When both Foxx and Wilson left the show, NBC attempted to create a spin-off show called *Sanford Arms* but it was not as successful. See also Janet Staiger, *Blockbuster TV: Must-See Sitcoms in the Network Era* (New York: New York UP, 2000); Christine Acham, *Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

³⁵ Acham, *Revolution Televised*, 91.

American sitcoms to air on television.³⁶ Redd Foxx had started in the jazz circuit and then attempted to stake a claim in stand-up comedy. His stand-up comedy was described as jazz-like—a free form vibe and a “style that seemed leisurely and off-the cuff as he strung together a loose mélange of comic stories, riffing on whatever seemed to pop into his head. And he used the language of the streets, since he felt that made him more identifiable and accessible to his black audience.”³⁷ Foxx sought out a manager to help him enter into the industry as a stand-up comedian within the comedy circuit in Los Angeles. Foxx’s jazzy comedy style could have appealed to Ali, just as Ali’s continued success in cultivating black talent may have appealed to Foxx. With Ali as manager, Foxx’s visibility widened from stand-up comedy in places with up-and-coming figures like Frank Sinatra, Bill Cosby, and Richard Pryor and primetime spots on *The Hollywood Squares*, *The Merv Griffin Show*, and the *Mike Douglas Show*.³⁸ Foxx and Ali next connected with Norman Lear and Bud Yorkin, producers who wanted to adapt a British series, *Steptoe and Son*. This British series morphed in *Sanford and Son*. The show’s namesake came from Redd Foxx, whose real last name, Sanford, became the last name of his character on screen.³⁹ The *Sanford and Son* story centered on a father (Fred Sanford played by Redd Foxx)

³⁶ Although Foxx, as the main character in the show, received most of the spotlight, Ali was a critical component to Foxx’s success and his status as manager is frequently mentioned. In the *High Point Enterprise*, a newspaper in North Carolina, Ali was listed as the recipient of Foxx’s fan mail. See “Stars’ Addresses,” *The High Point Enterprise*, High Point, NC, Mar. 10, 1976, 1. During a contract dispute that resulted in Foxx stopping work, Ali was the person who fielded newspaper inquiries. In the *Philadelphia Daily News* Ali is quoted as explaining Foxx’s absence from the show as a result of exhaustion. See Jim O’Brien, “Case of the Ailing Foxx,” *Philadelphia Daily News*, Philadelphia, PA, 29. Ali had to manage Foxx’s image, manage his spending, and deal with his open cocaine addiction. See Starr, *Black and Blue*.

³⁷ Starr, *Black and Blue*, 46

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

³⁹ Robin R. Coleman, *African American Viewers and the Black Situation Comedy: Situating Racial Humor* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 300.

and son (Lamont Sanford played by Desmond Wilson) who both owned and worked at a junkyard. The plot showcased their complicated but loving father-son relationship.⁴⁰

Black television was an outgrowth of music sensations like Motown Supremes, the Temptations, and Aretha Franklin as well as movies like *Shaft* and *Cotton Comes to Harlem*, and the *Flip Wilson Show* had proven that black entertainers could captivate a mainstream audience.⁴¹ With the growing popularity of television, TV shows like *Sanford and Son* “revolutionized television” by challenging “the monopoly of whiteness on television,” by showing perspectives of black peoples and communities, and producing opportunities for lead black actors and supporting players like Ali.⁴²

Ali’s screen time in front of the camera, like his role as Crystal’s father in the “Here Comes the Bride, There Goes the Bride” episode was a rarity yet the press often highlighted his role as the “behind-the-scenes” manager in ways that reinforced the show’s African American sensibility in both stereotypical ways but also in ways that a black audience might recognize and appreciate.⁴³ For instance, in the local newspaper, *Florence Morning News* on March 25, 1972, the headline read, “Soul Food Served ‘Sanford and Son.’” The article describes the usual food

⁴⁰ The show had two sequels that were not successful, *The Sanford Arms* (1970) and *Sanford* (1980-1981). Coleman, *African American Viewers and the Black Situation Comedy*, 90.

⁴¹ Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 188.

⁴² David J. Leonard and Lisa A. Guerrero. “Introduction: Our Regularly Scheduled Program,” in *African Americans on Television: Race-ing for Ratings*, eds. David J. Leonard and Lisa Guerrero (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2013), 11. But what was remarkable about *Sanford and Son* and other television shows like *Good Times* and *The Jeffersons* was these were black subjects in black communities, had few interactions with whites, and showed a lived experience that had never be captured before on television. In other words, the shows were framed “in black-centered worlds and through black-orientated circumstances, a never seen before consciousness was added to the comedic discourse in which race, racism, class, and cultural differences were explored” and which changed the focus from African Americans as objects to African American subjects on television. See Coleman, *African American Viewers and the Black Situation Comedy*, 89.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

that is served to the cast during its weekly Wednesday dress rehearsals on set as being hamburgers, tuna fish sandwiches, and grilled cheese sandwiches.⁴⁴ The writer then notes, “recently, for a change of pace, Redd Foxx’s manager, Bardu Ali, had a local soul food restaurant deliver plates of chicken, ribs, greens, corn bread and sweet potato pie.”⁴⁵ The article shows the central role that Ali had as manager and on set. In this instance, he is named as the person responsible for helping shift the food from hamburgers to soul food. In other words, he is represented as the person who helped to support black culture on the set and black business outside of it. The article goes on to describe Foxx teaching executive producer Bud Yorkin the “proper” way to eat sweet potato pie (making sure that he eats the crust). There is an aspect of voyeurism that is embedded in the article, geared toward those that may be unfamiliar with soul food. For example, the particular foods are listed, with an entire paragraph (in a limited four paragraph article) dedicated to the description of the food. This is reinforced by the fact that the incident was recorded in multiple mainstream newspapers.⁴⁶ The “proper” way to eat sweet potato pie is detailed, which enables the audience to be taught, like Bud Yorkin, by Foxx and the show. Foxx and the cast, including Ali, are set in contrast to Yorkin, because they presumably know soul food.

The mainstream fascination with soul food, however, did not start with Ali, Foxx, and *Sanford and Son*. It had begun even earlier, with articles, restaurants, and cookbooks being popularized in the 1960s.⁴⁷ Soul food had previously been stigmatized because it was associated

⁴⁴ “Soul Food Served ‘Sanford and Son,’” *Florence Morning News*, Florence, SC, Mar. 25, 1972, 27.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ “Soul Food Steals Show.” *The Pittsburg Press*, Pittsburg, PA (May 5, 1972), 46; “Soul Food for ‘Sanford & Son.’” *Daily World*. Opelousas, LA (Apr. 2, 1972), 49; “Soul Food Served ‘Sanford and Son,’” *Florence Morning News*, Florence, SC (Mar. 25, 1972), 27.

⁴⁷ Doris Witt, *Black Hunger: Food and the Politics of U.S. Identity* (Oxford UP, 1999), 82.

with an inaccurate homogenized “slave diet” but was recuperated by the black middle-class population after World War II in the attempt to assert an “authentic” black diet.⁴⁸ By the 1960s, the term “soul food” had entered common lexicon through the politicized endeavors of people like LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) who celebrated it as a form of black pride.⁴⁹ Such an understanding of soul food was positioned against others, like that of Elijah Muhammad, who saw soul food as constituting unclean and unhealthy eating and Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver who saw soul food as a black bourgeois form of slumming.⁵⁰ In the context of Black Power, the debate about soul food within the black community represented something much larger than just food. Instead, “it became a site of interracial struggle over the regulation of (what many perceived as an unregulated explosion of) blackness.”⁵¹ Moreover, where cookbooks and discussions of soul food tended to also acknowledge the black women’s role in the cooking of the food, particularly chitterlings, its hyperattention to the “stink” or odor of the food problematically associated black women with the presumed filth of soul food, not its consumption.⁵² This is subtly reinforced in the articles about *Sanford and Son*’s cast. The articles describe the presence of women, actress Lynn Hamilton and her friend Royce Wallace, as responsible for bringing “22 pounds of pigs’ feet to the set the same day.”⁵³ The pigs’ feet was both something to be enjoyed and also served as a prop during a *Sanford and Son* dinner scene being taped. The women, in this instance, are not described as participating in the consumption of soul food and are instead aligned with pigs’ feet, likely the least desirable food for readers

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 80.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 81.

⁵¹ Ibid., 83.

⁵² Ibid., 88.

⁵³ “Soul Food for ‘Sanford & Son.’” *Daily World*. Opelousas, LA (Apr. 2, 1972), 49.

unfamiliar with the cuisine. The fact that the article highlights the men (Foxx, Ali, and Yorkin) eating soul food also reinforces this masculinized consumption as opposed to its feminized production and delivery and reflected the wider debates about blackness linked to the visibility of men (and against the limited visibility of black women). In showing the male actors and the characters in the show eating soul food, it created a voyeuristic adventure for white viewers at the same time it tied Foxx, Ali, and the *Sanford and Son* crew to a relatable working-class blackness. This relatable working-class masculine identity, for both white and black audiences, was created through the diminishment of value of the women's role in the consumption of soul food and as actresses in the *Sanford and Son* show.

However, Ali's relationship to female performers were complicated. For instance, prior to his management of Redd Foxx's career, Ali bolstered many black talents including Ella Fitzgerald, "Little Esther" Phillips, and Big Jay McNeely.⁵⁴ Ali also held a long relationship with Melba Liston, the "first woman wind-instrumentalist in the Lincoln Theater house band, conducted by Bardu Ali."⁵⁵ Finding Etta James is Ali's biggest legacy. Multiple renditions of the story exist but, according to Otis's biography, Ali was persistent and forced Otis to listen to James. However, "too shy to audition for Otis in the room, she walked into the bathroom, where the acoustics were better and where she could not be seen from where Johnny sat" and impressed Otis with her vocals.⁵⁶ That was the springboard for Etta James's start on the Johnny Otis Show and into fame. Ali is perceived as *the* gateway between Otis and James. In the music industry, aesthetics and culture of leading was very much coded as male, with discourses connected to

⁵⁴ Starr, *Black and Blue*, 47.

⁵⁵ "Tribute to Jazz Musician Melba Liston, Sunday," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, Mar, 18 2004. See also Lisa Barg, "Taking Care of Music: Gender, Arranging, and Collaboration in the Weston-Liston Partnership," *Black Music Research Journal*, 34.1 (Spring 2014).

⁵⁶ Lipsitz, *Midnight at the Barrelhouse*, 65

ideas of “discipline, autonomy, efficiency, and mastery.”⁵⁷ In this narrative, it is Ali’s paternalism and keen eye for talent and persistence that helped to solidify James’ career. Ali’s traditional masculine role as “discoverer” is juxtaposed by a very traditional gendering of James—a type of modesty and timid nature that could have prevented her from becoming a star.⁵⁸ Her agency and power is diminished while Ali’s assertiveness is highlighted as the key component for James’s fame.

Media coverage used gender as a means to establish racial norms and belonging, and newspapers often highlighted Ali’s black identity and his masculinity. In 1944, *The Chicago Defender* described Ali as having gotten into a fight with *Eagle* columnist J.T. Gipson. Ali had spotted jazz pianist and singer, Dorothy Donegan, in the crowd at a show and had encouraged her to take the stage and sing. According to Gipson, Donegan was booed by the audience when she refused to sing. The situation escalated to the point where Gipson and Ali got into a fight. The article’s sensational headline captured reader’s attention as it read, “Bardu Ali Goes Joe Louis So Critic Hits the Floor.”⁵⁹ Ali’s comparison to African American boxer Joe Lewis signals an association to a masculine African American identity. American masculinity has been tied to boxing as claims to strength was associated with power and identity. For instance, the defeat of Jim Jeffries by Jack Johnson in 1910 disrupted white perceptions of manhood when the black boxer triumphed over a white boxer.⁶⁰ The connection between black men and notions of virility, aggressiveness, and physical strength were reinforced through Johnson’s win. Returning to the

⁵⁷ Barg, “Taking Care of Music,” 97.

⁵⁸ Mary Campbell, “The incomparable Ella: ‘Don’t sing near the window,’ pilots tell her,” *Journal Gazette*, Mattoon, IL (Apr. 14, 1989), 17.

⁵⁹ Lawrence F. LaMar, “Bardu Ali Goes Joe Louis So Critic Hits The Floor,” *The Chicago Defender* (April 29, 1944).

⁶⁰ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

article on Ali, although the debate is over whether or not Donegan would take center stage, it is Ali's brute power that is foregrounded in this article. Nicole Fleetwood argues that black representation and visibility has been connected to the black male body. This in turn has "positioned the black female visual as its excess."⁶¹ In this situation, Ali is configured in ways that show his prominence and power, while Donegan, as a black woman, is positioned as a body in excess. It was these "iterations of blackness" that tied Ali to a black masculinity in newspapers that was supported and acceptable within the sphere of black music and television.⁶²

The embrace of Ali as black was not just connected to gender and the industries he worked but was also a reflection of the potent advocacy by black leaders as they attempted to shift cultural perceptions of blackness in the United States. Seminal legal cases like *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the fight for racial integration, coupled with white backlash against these measures, strengthened black embrace of a black identity. The black community also homogenized a black identity by incorporating mixed race, essentially refiguring the one drop rule as a "tool of inclusivity to promote unity and numerical strength."⁶³ Black nationalism shifted attitudes further to reinforce a type of aesthetic idealism and pride in being black. Perceptions of Ali as black during this time period was likely compounded by the fact that in the post-1946 era, when the ban on South Asian immigrants ended, there was a decrease in the South Asian community embrace of outmarriage and interracial relationships. For instance, while the turn of the century had created a rich community of mixed Punjabi-Mexican Americans in California and an acknowledgment of multiraciality from within the community, the introduction

⁶¹ Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (University of Chicago Press, 2014), 9.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶³ Nikki Khanna, *Biracial in America: Forming and Performing Racial Identity* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), 37.

of new South Asian immigrants after 1946 made it less necessary to engage with other racial communities.⁶⁴ For Ali, being claimed as black enabled him access into the burgeoning black industries of jazz and black television. It also fit into growing perceptions of a politicized black identity that were connected to the emerging civil rights movement and black nationalism.

That is not to say that Ali claiming a black identity did not come without costs. Being perceived as black meant that Ali also experienced racism and discrimination, particularly within the music industry where musicians frequently traveled throughout the United States. He was not immune to the Jim Crow laws or the continued violence and terror that occurred with intensity in the South (and also throughout the entire country). While performing with Chick Webb, Ali recalled trying to fill gas for his car in a small town in Georgia (with Chick Webb sleeping in the passenger seat) when he was denied service because he was not white. Infuriated, Ali tried to claim the identity of the jazz great, Duke Ellington, a name that was lost on the white gas attendant and ineffective.⁶⁵ Black entertainers routinely faced explicit racism such as being denied hotels or restaurant service, or worse being physically beaten or arrested while on the road.⁶⁶

Passing was typically done by being in proximity to, and immersed in the racial community, however, passing as black had different implications compared to passing as white. Men passing as white saw increased wages and women passing as white were elevated in class status (defined as “ladies”) and gained access to public resources and areas. Passing as white also

⁶⁴ Paul Spickard, “Who is an Asian? Who Is a Pacific Islander? Monoracialism, Multiracial People, and Asian American Communities,” in *The Sum of Our Parts: Mixed Heritage Asian Americans* eds. Teresa Williams-León and Cynthia L. Nakashima (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2001), 16.

⁶⁵ Johnny Otis, *Listen to the Lambs* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 160.

⁶⁶ George Lipsitz, *Midnight at the Barrelhouse: The Johnny Otis Story* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 47.

came with risk. Allyson Hobbs argues that blacks passing for white was a strategy that came with the fear of getting caught, exile from community, and in most cases, the loss of family. She argues that “a more complete understand of this practice [of passing as white] requires a reckoning with the loss, alienation, and isolation that accompanied, and often outweighed, its rewards.”⁶⁷ In contrast, whites passed as black to make interracial relationships more socially acceptable or reinforced their place within racially dominated genres (like Mezz Mezzrow or Johnny Otis within jazz).⁶⁸ For others, temporary passing as black functioned as a form of thrill seeking or served as social commentary (like John Howard Griffin) where whites could “become better whites through excursions into blackness.”⁶⁹ Ali playing up his black identity did not exempt him from the racism or discrimination felt by blacks during this time but it did help solidify his place within the jazz community and had less risk than trying to passing as white.

The Limitations of Silence and a Multiracial Identity

Ali’s ambiguity and active silence about his racialized identity enabled newspapers to position him in ways that propelled his career forward as he slipped between exotically Other and decidedly black. However, the state held a more static perspective when they classified Ali’s entire family as black in the 1900 census. This record shows the ease in which active silence can slip into being silenced. For census takers, the question of race was complex and oftentimes confusing, and this was also reflected in the changing policies of recording racially mixed individuals throughout history. Census categories were initially based on slave codes,

⁶⁷ Hobbs, *A Chosen Exile*, 6.

⁶⁸ Baz Dreisinger, *Near Black, White-to-Black Passing in American Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

deciphering who was enslaved and thus what types of freedoms they lacked.⁷⁰ The census did, however, account for racial mixing, between blacks and whites. For instance, between 1850 and 1930, “mulatto” was its own racial category on the census.⁷¹ The census estimated that three-fourths of blacks in the United States were racially mixed but discrimination and Jim Crow made these identities largely indistinguishable.⁷² This was exacerbated by the fact that prior to 1960 race was recorded by census takers, not self-reported.⁷³

Ali’s family was living in the South for the 1900 census, a location that read Asians unevenly in a system designed to differentiate between black and white. Asians, beyond just Bengali men, occupied an ambiguous and provisional position in the South that was not always informed by law and instead based on the complexity of the racial and cultural landscapes of the region. In the South, African Americans would sometimes wear turbans in order to pass as “Hindu” or “East Indian” and thus gain access to restaurants or public transportation that would have normally been denied to them had they been read as African American.⁷⁴ Early Bengali Muslim peddlers who sold “Oriental” items to whites and frequently interacted with whites were read, given their complexion, to be similar to African Americans. In these instances, it was the body that was read as black or Asian and this was also reflected in the counting and categorizing of these communities by the state, through systems like the United States census. Ali’s early life was spent in New Orleans, his family representing one rich and dynamic multicultural and multigenerational household that resulted from immigration from India and the Caribbean, with

⁷⁰ Janice A., Radway, et al. “Part VI, Body-Talk,” in *American Studies: An Anthology*, eds. Janice A. Radway et al. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009), 55.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 142.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁷⁴ Bald, *Bengali Harlem*, 50.

two religions under one roof.⁷⁵ However, according to the United States census in 1900, it was likely they were perceived as simply black bodies to be counted, lumped together without regard to the nuance of lived experiences and migratory origins. In other words, despite the multiplicity of readings of Asians and African Americans in the South, Ali's categorization reveals a government racial system that left no room for ambiguity.

The Exoticization of Ali and the Power of Silence

Ali, however, was not always read as black. Particularly in the beginning of his career, newspapers spotlighted Ali's perceived South Asian racial difference. The early and occasional gestures to his South Asian ancestry in the 1920s illustrates the ways that his body unsettled the dominant discourses of blackness and connected to the popular turn of the century Orientalism.

In the 1920s, Ali was living in Harlem performing as a dancer in vaudeville and had a brief stint in a band with his brother before getting recruited by Chick Webb to join his swing jazz band.⁷⁶ New York saw a significant growth in black Americans after World War I, with many moving out of the South, seeking opportunities in the urban and industrialized cities.⁷⁷ Between 1910 and 1930, New York's population doubled.⁷⁸ Black artists and writers specifically gravitated toward Harlem. The music industry and black cultural scene shifted from places like Chicago and New Orleans to New York, which helped to construct "jazz"—a term that was

⁷⁵ Ibid., 85.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 87. After Moksad's early death of tuberculosis in 1918, Ella brought six of her children to live with her sister in the Bronx. Bardu may have been one of the six children to move north since by age 23 his marriage certificate to Margaret Caree (his first wife) had listed his residence in Harlem and his profession as "actor."

⁷⁷ James Donald, *Some of These Days: Black Stars, Jazz Aesthetics, and Modernist Culture* (New York: Oxford UP, 2015).

⁷⁸ Douglass, *Terrible Honesty*. See also Ngô, *Imperial Blues*.

loosely applied to the musical culture that sprung from jazz music proper, blues, ragtime, Tin Pan Alley pop and the ensuing dancing and comedy acts in the 125 African American nightclubs in Harlem.⁷⁹ While black leaders struggled to gain political advancement, cultural artists found success and “a haven and stomping ground” in Harlem.⁸⁰ The musical scene in Harlem, in other words, provided an alternative type of political strategy for African American power and visibility.

The first known documentation of Bardu Ali’s multiracial identity occurred in March of 1926 in the theatrical section of the *Afro-American*, a Baltimore based black press that was expanding nationally. Describing Ali’s dancing career alongside his brother in their band, “Baby and Bardu Ali,” the article explains the brothers as having “parents of varied races” while inaccurately claiming that Ali was a product of a Creole mother and a Turkish father “engaged in the silk import trade.” Even more telling, the article listed Ali’s other siblings as: “Abdeen, Bahadoor, Mohamed, Aklemia, Roheanon, Monseur, and others with names just as unusual among the colored populace.”⁸¹ These names were signifiers of difference, and *Afro-American*’s attention to this difference showcased Ali as both inside and outside: incorporated into the “colored populace” yet “unusual.”

Ali’s physical appearance is further differentiated from the greater black community as he and his siblings are described as all having “olive complexions and glistening black hair so in vogue with modern day sheiks.”⁸² This exoticism of the Asian Other was not a new phenomenon. Within music, South Asian culture was widely consumed as “Tin Pan Alley

⁷⁹ Douglass, *Terrible Honesty*, 74.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁸¹ “Dancer’s Parents of Varied Races,” *Afro-American*, Mar. 27, 1926, 6.

⁸² *Ibid.*

songwriters churned out show tunes such as ‘My Hindoo Man’ and ‘Down in Bom-Bombay,’ which middle-class Americans sang to amuse themselves in the piano parlors of their homes.”⁸³ The term “sheik” was also made popular, particularly after the 1921 film, *The Sheik*, with Rudolph Valentino, the original “Latin lover.” When used to describe black or brown male bodies, the term connoted a particular exotic masculinity, one that was seen as strangely desirable, erotic, and yet in need of discipline and control.⁸⁴ The participation of black men using “orientalist signifiers” linked the popular imaginations of Arab masculinities with black masculinities. These linkages enmeshed ideas of exoticism, primitivism, and danger that represented a blurring of racial borders.⁸⁵ On the one hand, men could perform as “sheik” (performing as Asian and wearing Asian attire) to gain subjectivity and power.⁸⁶ On the other hand, it conflated the histories and differences between blacks and Asians. For instance, it manufactured a linked history in an imaginary Other location (Arabia) that was far beyond the shores of the United States.⁸⁷ Ali’s body, marked as both Asian and black, blurred some racial boundaries while sharpening those between white and “other” through the term “sheik.”

Ali’s depiction as “sheik” gestured toward a particular type of fantasy of intimacy that was dangerous while titillating. Men of color who were described as sheiks were just as easily categorized as virile and desirable as degenerate and oversexed.⁸⁸ For men of color, the latter was dangerous territory: interracial relationships were policed in the service of maintaining a

⁸³ Bald, *Bengali Harlem*, 17. See also See Hoganson, *Consumer’s Imperium* and Yoshihara, *Embracing the East*.

⁸⁴ Ngô, *Imperial Blues*, 148.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 150.

“pure” white womanhood.⁸⁹ This patrolling took various forms and affected various racial groups at specific historical moments and contexts. Laws called attention to and attempted to patrol interracial relationships between Asian men and white women.⁹⁰ Newspaper accounts of these relationships circulated to show innocent white women in the hands of evil Asian men.⁹¹ For instance, the socialization between Indian migrant Said Ali Khan and Portuguese woman, Rosa Domingo in 1913 established Khan as the prime suspect in her murder. Khan was framed as the unrequited lover and produced heightened fear of Indian men in San Francisco as “brutal, perilous, and irrational.”⁹² Black men with white women were seen as committing the ultimate crime—rape. Whether consensual or not, relationships between black men and white women had the potential to result in false accusations of rape, which led to the lynching of thousands of black males in the United States.⁹³ These laws created and maintained white supremacy and called for a protection of white womanhood as white property.⁹⁴ In this moment, Ali is framed as more desirable and less dangerous, with the allure of Arabian “sheik masculinity” at the foreground. However, it was a gamble to play on the “sheik” image because newspapers racialized male sexualization of both black and Asian men. And both black and Asian men, ultimately, were perceived as encroaching on white woman, who understood as the property of white men.

⁸⁹ Different discourses appeared when the coupling was white men and women of color. See Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*.

⁹⁰ Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, 82. Laws highlighted “Chinamen” and the Cable Act (1922) revoked the citizenship of a white woman, if she married an Asian male.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, chapter 3. See also Lee, *Orientalism*.

⁹² Shah, *Stranger Intimacies*, 50.

⁹³ Lisa Lindquist Door, *White Women, Rape, and the Power of Race in Virginia, 1900-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). She provides a more complex treatment of the accusations and rape trials of black men during this time period. In particular, she shows the circumstances when black men were protected from white women’s accusations.

⁹⁴ Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*, chapter 3; Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacies*.

Newspapers linked Ali to the term “sheik” and its connotations to interracial relationships but they did not frame Ali’s actual recorded relationships with women as a threat to the color line. That is, the press did not view his stage persona as a virile and exotic “sheik” as a threat in real life. This comes as no surprise, since none of the women he was associated with were perceived as white. Bardu Ali had multiple marriages, the first was recorded by the census and which categorized both Ali and his wife Margaret Caree as black. Ali would then meet Vivian Harris, a comedian and chorus girl from a black family who had numerous performances at the Apollo Theater in Harlem and the Cotton Club. She had toured Europe with Lew Leslie’s revue *Blackbirds*, likely at the same time as Ali (in 1934).⁹⁵ In 1938, the *Pittsburg Courier* identified singer Vivian Harris as Ali’s wife in a large photo of a woman having a Sunday morning stroll on horseback.⁹⁶ In the 1940s, Ali had moved to the west coast, settling in Los Angeles, where he met singer Johnny Otis and married a Mexican women, Tila.⁹⁷ Otis and Ali likely met at Club Alabam, since Tila Ali owned a coffee house next to the club, and Otis was the leader of the House Band at Club Alabam.⁹⁸ Johnny Otis, Bardu and Tila Ali joined forces to collectively

⁹⁵ Douglas Martin, “Vivian Harris, Comedian, Chorus Girl and Longtime ‘Voice of the Apollo,’ Dies at 97,” March 26, 2000, *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/03/26/nyregion/vivian-harris-comedian-chorus-girl-and-longtime-voice-of-the-apollo-dies-at-97.html>, accessed on Dec. 27, 2017. See also J.P. Wearing, *The London Stage 1930-1939: A Calendar of Productions, Performers, and Personnel* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 380.

⁹⁶ “‘Cantering Through Central Park,’ *the Pittsburg Courier*, Pittsburg, PA (July 16, 1938), 5. However, it is unknown if Ali did in fact marry Harris as her obituary does not mention a marriage to him.

⁹⁷ Anthony Macias, *Mexican American Mojo: Popular Music, Dance, and Urban Culture, 1935-1968* (Durham: Duke UP, 2008).

⁹⁸ Lipsitz, George, *Midnight at the Barrelhouse*. The Barrelhouse was located at 107th and Wilmington in Watts, California and was said to be named after an Omaha club where Johnny and Preston Love “formed their first combo,” xvi.

open and own *The Barrelhouse*, which “was the first nightclub anywhere devoted exclusively to rhythm and blues”—a genre of music that had been rapidly growing in popularity.⁹⁹

Even though she was not marked as black, Tila represents a type of acceptable interracial relationship because Latinas were perceived as sexually available to men.¹⁰⁰ Interracial relationships between Latinos (particularly Mexican Americans) and whites had a long history, resulting from Spanish conquest and which was often a product of coercion and rape of African and indigenous women by Spaniards.¹⁰¹ Yet in Los Angeles during the 1940s and 1950s, relationships between Mexican women and black men were not extremely typical. Mexican women that danced with black men sometimes even earned “bad reputations.”¹⁰² Instead, anti-black prejudice create a proximity that enabled Mexican Americans to consume and perform music associated with black culture, like R&B while also establishing a distance which allowed them more economic and cultural mobility, with opportunities to join white unions and white bands.¹⁰³ Bardu and Tila illustrate one example of racial crossing in intimate relationships. However, the fact that he was not linked, at least publicly, to a white woman reinforces the

⁹⁹ Lipsitz, *Midnight at the Barrelhouse*, xxv. By the 1940s, big bands were being replaced by “rhythm and blues” or R&B. The term R&B connoted the linguistic transition from describing “race records” or music that targeted African Americans to a more generic term like “rhythm and blues.” Richard J. Ripani, *New Blue Music: Changes in Rhythm & Blues, 1950-1999* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), 18. R&B reflected a wide range of music from rock and roll, pop, soul, funk, and disco. R&B also had smaller bands with a “tighter rhythmic feel in fast tempo music” and a “backbeat, a distinct off beat accent in common time” as well as an emotional undertone that permeated the music. See Stuart L. Goosman, *Group Harmony: The Black Urban Roots of Rhythm and Blues* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 9. It was a genre for black singers or producers for a largely black audience that diverged from the realism of the blues and reflected what some saw as more urban—“a smoother, poppier strain.” See Ward, *Just My Soul Responding*, 40.

¹⁰⁰ Ngô, *Imperial Blues*, 56.

¹⁰¹ Bost, *Mulattas and Mestizas*, 9.

¹⁰² Macias, *Mexican American Mojo*, 148.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 47. Mexicans, in the workforce were seen as “a rung or two up the socioeconomic ladder” and were able to get hired to jobs that blacks could not.

strength of the social and legal prohibitions regarding relationships between men of color and white women.

While these women showcased themselves as features within cultural entertainment, their stories were secondary to the work of cultural producers like Ali. This was particularly true with Ali's relationship with Harris. For instance, in November of 1936 in the "Stage and Screen" section, the *Pittsburg Courier* proclaimed "Famous Bandleader Attempts to End Life: Bardu Ali Drinks Poison in N.Y. Flat."¹⁰⁴ The article explains that Ali's estranged wife refused a divorce needed so he could marry Harris so Ali drank Lysol and was rushed to the hospital. The suicide attempt "happened on Thursday, and Friday found the baton-wielder viewing the revue on tap at the Apollo Theatre, where Vivian Harris, the girl he would marry if he was able to secure a divorce from his first wife, is appearing."¹⁰⁵ The article's title and replacement of Ali's name with the noun "baton-wielder" firmly associates Ali with his cultural career as a bandleader first, and his love troubles as secondary in theme. In contrast, despite the fact that Harris's obituary in the *New York Times* in 2000 calls her the "voice of the Apollo," the cultural work she performed is not even named. Additionally, calling Harris "girl," reinforced a particularized femininity and "naturalized girlishness."¹⁰⁶ The diminishment of Harris's cultural work, like many women performers, created the perception that women were simply appendages to male cultural performers' successes.¹⁰⁷ It also shows the power that black newspapers like the *Pittsburg Courier* had in the shaping of these narratives.

¹⁰⁴"Bardu Ali Drinks Poison in N.Y. Flat." *Pittsburgh Courier*. Nov. 12, 1936.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Sherrie Tucker, *Swing Shift: "All-Girl" Bands of the 1940s* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000). See also Jeanette Hall, Ph.D. diss., (tentatively titled) "Performances in Swing: A Cultural History of Women Singers of Big Bands, 1930s-1950s," University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 2018.

¹⁰⁷ See Tucker, *Swing Shift*.

Black newspaper's attention to the allure of Ali during the 1920s and 1930s positioned the mixed race body as available for consumption by African American readers, but was also in line with white consumption of the Orient. Black consumption of the Orient was fueled through African American newspapers, which have a long history in the United States with *Freedom's Journal*, the first black newspaper printing beginning in 1827.¹⁰⁸ The black press was crucial in the definition and molding of a black national identity and helped to shape who belonged and who did not.¹⁰⁹ Specifically, these newspapers illustrate the complicated discourses of affiliation and disavowal between African American and South Asians.

Ali's exoticization could be read as aligning the feeling of Otherness and alienation between the two groups. South Asian leaders (like political activist, Lala Lajpat Rai and writer Basanta Koomar Roy) and African American leaders (perhaps most famously Du Bois and Marcus Garvey) vocalized their commonalities in the black press, and "regularly made explicit comparisons between British imperialism in Indian and oppression in the United States" in an effort to build alliances across race and nation.¹¹⁰ Black leaders looked to places like China and Japan as sites ripe for revolutionary potential. Orientalism was used in the late nineteenth century as a way to negotiate black racialization.¹¹¹ *The African Times* and *Orient Review* both were heralded to embody "the aims, desires and intensions of the Black, Brown, and Yellow races."¹¹² These instances show the strong ties and coalition building that occurred between Asians and blacks.

¹⁰⁸ Helen H. Jun, "Black Orientalism: Nineteenth-Century Narratives of Race and U.S. Citizenship," *American Quarterly*, 58.4 (Dec. 2006), 1050.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 1053.

¹¹⁰ Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Harvard: Harvard UP, 2012), 43.

¹¹¹ Jun, "Black Orientalism, 1049.

¹¹² Qtd. in *Ibid.*, 69.

However, Ali and his siblings' representation in the black press show that there were limits to the declaration of an alliance between Asians and blacks. Ali and his siblings were represented as not completely part of the "colored populace" and therefore not completely part of that race or community. Black newspapers commonly utilized the "Orientalist discourses of Asian cultural difference" such as the anti-Chinese movement to help distance blacks from Asians-as-foreigners.¹¹³ Establishing difference from immigrant communities was a mechanism for power, albeit limited, that served to lay greater claim to American national belonging by African Americans. During the early twentieth century, when the United States experienced mass immigration that led to the rise of "scientific" racial thinking about racial hierarchies with whites on the top of the hierarchy, many African Americans sought to distance themselves from these immigrant groups. For instance, some blacks began labeling themselves as "Aframerican" instead of the hyphenated "Afro-American." The elimination of the hyphen signified a difference from hyphenated immigrants coming from Europe and Asia.¹¹⁴ Without the hyphen, blacks were staking a nativist claim to the United States against other racialized and newly immigrant groups. This determined self-expression of identity attempted to work against rhetoric that proclaimed there was a "Negro invasion of Harlem."¹¹⁵ In this way, Ali's exoticization was a product of the distance the black community felt they needed in order to stake a claim within United States politics and culture.

Ali capitalized on this racial distance between Asians and African Americans by continuing to mark his music with "exotic" sounds. On the playbill for the Venetian Gardens, "Bardu Ali and His Orchestra" is listed in bold on the bottom. Framed as "America's Newest

¹¹³ Jun, "Black Orientalism," 1048.

¹¹⁴ Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 308.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 309.

Negro Band Sensation,” the playbill reads, “Rhumbas! Congas! Waltzes! 16 of the hottest entertainers ever assembled. Hear them once and you’ll agree! Played to sell-out crowds at Apollo Theatre, Savory Ballroom, Tropicana Club and Paradise Club in New York City.”¹¹⁶ Afro-Cuban music, with African and Cuban flavors were extremely popular in jazz during this time. Cuban musical forms like the Cuban *sones* (called rhumbas in the United States) and conga had gained popularity in the 1930s, and which mixed European and African instruments and rhythms.¹¹⁷ At Philadelphia’s waterfront boardwalk, a 1941 newspaper article published in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* describes the “tropical” flavors of entertainment. Included is Ali’s “fastest-stepping aggregation” and their “congas and rumbas ring special bells.” Yet, what is more telling is the descriptions of the other bands and entertainers. Alongside Ali’s band description are the exotic monikers of “Alzira Camargo, the Brazilian bombshell; Estrelita Pena, from Peru; Charley Boy Rimac, Chiquita Nearia, the La Gitons and finally the Cheena de Simone-ers. Authentic rumbas are played by Juanita.”¹¹⁸ Places and cultural influences in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East influenced and shaped jazz music, pushing its boundaries and creating a hybrid musical style that came to define jazz.¹¹⁹ Frances R. Aparicio and Cándida F. Jáquez examine “musical migrations,” or what they term is “the process of dislocation, transformation, and mediation that characterizes musical structures, production, and performances as they cross national and cultural borders and transform their meanings from one historical period to another.”¹²⁰ By

¹¹⁶ “Grand Opening,” *Altoona Tribune*, Altoona, PA, Apr. 12, 1941, 9.

¹¹⁷ Paul A. Fernandez, *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), vii. See also Ngô, *Imperial Blues*.

¹¹⁸ Rudolph Burlingame, “Seashore Night Clubs Ready for Big Crowds,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Philadelphia, PA, July 3, 1941, 16.

¹¹⁹ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers: Modern Jazz in Revolutionary Times*. (Harvard: Harvard UP, 2012), 7.

¹²⁰ Frances R. Aparicio and Cándida F. Jáquez, eds. *Musical Migration: Transnationalism and Cultural Hybridity in Latin/o America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 3.

incorporating the transnational circuits of Latin musical styles, Ali pushed against the “Eurocentric hegemonic notions of musical standards” in ways that allowed for a fluidity in terms of both musical aesthetic and ethnic identity.¹²¹

In contrast to other artists that were described with terms like “Brazilian bombshell” and “from Peru,” which establish a type of gendered exoticism, or were described as playing “authentic rumbas,” Ali’s band is not framed as authentic in relationship to these Latin tunes. Ali’s music could be represented as an example of musical hybridity and musical crossover without being bound by purist notions of authenticity. In other words, it was perfectly acceptable for him to embody a slight exoticism of the Orient while also playing toward the audience with tunes from Latin America.

His ambiguous and fluid racial identity was also made possible because he did not explicitly articulate his own racial identification. Indeed, Ali’s voice remained almost entirely silent on the subject of race. While silence has the capacity to be read as an act of submissive complacency, it can also be read as a method of self-empowerment and agency both within African American and Asian American contexts. Debra Walker King contends that “silent mobility” was a strategy through which blacks were able to retain power, control, and “a sense of dignity” even in moments of racial hurt and pain.¹²² In this way, silence is a method to undercut expectations, refusing the audience the pleasure of audible pain. King notes, “in both African American communities and cultural production, suffering without complaint or pleading offers black people a claim to moral superiority over those that inflict pain” and was a mechanism of

¹²¹ Ibid., 8.

¹²² Debra Walker King, *African Americans and the Culture of Pain*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008).

survival, particularly in the South during Jim Crow.¹²³ For Asian Americans, silence has typically been framed as the result of exclusion from political agency. It also perpetuates the stereotype of Asian voices and Asians as “passive, inactive, diminutive, and (feebly) feminine—or in other words without power.”¹²⁴ However, the recuperation of silence for Asian American women has shown that silence can also be mobilized as a form of resistance to power within Asian American scholarship.¹²⁵ It also points toward the differences in being actively silent compared to being silenced.

Ali’s silence about his racialized identity can be read as an act of self-empowerment since Ali had a visible presence and respect in these various cultural industries. The majority of Ali’s career was spent on stage, his vast connection to powerful artists, and the mundane newspaper depictions (albeit mentioned only briefly) of his personal life indicate that he had ample opportunities to speak on his own behalf. Therefore, Ali could have articulated a specific racialized or mixed race identity. Yet his active silence gave him power and agency through a flexibly designed racialized identity that was never clearly announced. This helped ensure his entrance and participation in a rich and dynamic African American cultural circuit while his perceived exoticism also enabled him an edge of difference. The fact that his friends and associations were black, or read as black, demonstrate that it was likely that he knew he would be perceived as black as well (and not as Asian or mixed race). Ali’s silence can therefore be read as a form of agency, directly resulting from the intentional choices that he made throughout his lifetime.

¹²³ Ibid., 93.

¹²⁴ Bret Esaki, “Multidimensional Silence, Spirituality, and the Japanese American Art of Gardening,” *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 16.3 (Oct. 2013).

¹²⁵ Patti Duncan, *Tell This Silence: Asian American Women Writers and the Politics of Speech* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004), 14.

Ali's early career led him in and out of Chick Webb's orchestra as he attempted to pursue alternative routes for himself in music and entertainment. After the death of Chick Webb, Ali stayed briefly with the band and Ella Fitzgerald before moving on to form his own swing band.¹²⁶ With his own band, he did not disappoint audiences or critics. One newspaper described their debut saying, "when Bardu Ali, ex-Chick Webb band leader, stepped on the stage of Harlem's famous Apollo theatre last week in front of his own band, he justified the faith Chick placed in him for eight years. Local hep cats who caught the opening show, came prepared to yawn through the debut of 'just another band.' Instead they heard a new crew that clicked right from the opener."¹²⁷ Not only does the article showcase Ali's popularity to be able to assemble a band and gain a spot at the Apollo Theater to perform, but it also shows he continued to be well received and well respected. If the racialized body can be read "as a contested site of power and meaning-making," Ali reflected the hybridity and transnationalism of the cultural music circuits in the 1920s and 1930s.¹²⁸ Despite his relatively unknown fame outside African American entertainment, he was a central component in these spaces.

Conclusion

Throughout Ali's career, Ali's various racial identities shifted in step with the political and cultural interactions between African Americans and Asians. In the early 1920s, the uncomfortable relationship between Asian exclusion and African American national identity created an ambivalent embrace of Ali as a cultural producer. During this time, newspapers

¹²⁶ "Bardu Ali, Once with Chick Webb, Forms Band," *Chicago Defender*, Feb. 17, 1940.

¹²⁷ Bardu Ali's Band a Hit in N.Y. Debut," *The Chicago Defender*, Apr. 13, 1940, 20.

¹²⁸ Janice A., Radway, et al. "Part VI, Body-Talk," in *American Studies: An Anthology*, eds. Janice A. Radway et al. Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009), 327.

positioned Ali's body as different—exotic in name and in appearance. Starting in the 1940s and continuing on to Ali's participation in television, Ali's identity shifted to reflect a growing black nationalism and black identity that used masculinity to bolster black musicians and cultural producers at the expense of black women cultural producers' visibility. While Ali did not explicitly claim a multiracial identity, his silence was a tool for enabling a type of agency that both he and newspapers utilized. In this way, while government agencies and laws like the census and the one-drop rule attempted to construct and shape black identity, it was also individuals like Ali and the black community that actively sought to cultivate flexible racial identities as a way to participate in the United States politically, culturally, and creatively.

Conclusion

Both contemporary and historical case studies of Asian American mixed race show how “racial mixing and hybridity are neither problems for, nor solutions to, the long history of ‘race’ and racism, but part of its genealogy. Racisms can emerge, thrive, and transform quite effectively without ever being undone by the magical, privatized powers we invest in interracial intimacy and reproduction.”¹ This dissertation is a product of the responsiveness of the field of mixed race studies, which shows that we do not need to view mixed race as the antidote to racism. This pervasive myth is an intertwined product of liberal hopefulness and conservative ideological thinking that expanded in the 1980s and attempted to banish racism to a previous time. That a nation full of racially mixed people is a sign of a future that encompasses a more multicultural and diverse society belies the continuing conditions of racism that have been exacerbated by increasing class divides. The cultural producers in this dissertation neither incarnated the end of racism nor embodied the promise of a post-racial future.

Instead, by tracing the genealogy of Asian American racial mixing, this dissertation shows the various ways that racial identity intertwines with culture, law, and the broader social economic forces of each cultural producer within the contexts of bohemia (Hartmann), women’s magazines (Eaton), Hollywood (Oberon), and black newspapers and entertainment (Ali). Sadakichi Hartmann was emboldened by New York’s bohemia to push the boundaries of truth when it came to his racial identity. He established a white pseudonym of Sidney Allan, showcased his Japanese/German heritage, and even claimed a Korean/German background in the context of World War II. Merle Oberon and Bardu Ali were silent when it came to articulating a

¹ Nyong’o, *Amalgamation Waltz*, 174.

mixed race identity. However, their racial identities were flexibly read within Hollywood and African American entertainment (respectively). Oberon also cultivated a desirability for being mixed race in Hollywood while Ali's early identity showcased African American engagement with Orientalism in the 1920s, and then later reflected black nationalism and a black identity constructed by the black community. Winnifred Eaton capitalized on her prominence as a Eurasian fiction writer, using the venue of women's magazines to advocate for racial mixing. These four individuals demonstrate an astute recognition of their environment, an adaptation to the audiences that consumed their work, and a firm understanding of the United States racial landscape of their time periods.

This dissertation blurs the linear notion of racial progress and improvement surrounding mixed race by focusing on the complexity and contradictions of identity politics. This study refuses to celebrate either the "model" or the "resistant/deviant" subject. Viet Thanh Nguyen argues in *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America* that there is a tendency to see Asian American subjects within the binary frame of good or bad. The good subject (those who ascribe to, and reinforce, the model minority myth) is read against the bad subject (those whose reject assimilation into dominant American culture and need to be disciplined by dominant society).² He argues that there is a tendency for a privileging of the bad subject because it serves as a way to showcase strength and community-building through resistance. He warns, however, that this forces a type of inattention to the politics of seeing racial identity as a market as well as a commodity.

² Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America* (New York: Oxford UP, 2002), 144.

All four cultural producers engaged in a type of self-commodification of their mixed race identity. And being mixed race, in many respects, paid. Hartmann made money, for instance, within the lecture circuit by talking about his Japanese ancestry while asserting a type of similarity with his white upper-class audience. Oberon landed on advertisements and received royalties for product promotion that sought to market a mixed race look to women consumers. Eaton continuously used her mixed race in her writing, which sold to white women readers. Ali let newspapers define him, the flexibility of his identity following the shifting circuits of black entertainment, but in ways that provided him financial stability and a steady stream of gigs. All four cultural producers were able to carve out a career that was (to varying degrees) financially supportive.

All cultural producers also used the public's fascination with the Orient to their advantage. Hartmann's costumes, lecture topics, and antics subscribed to Orientalist ideas of Japan. Oberon reinforced the gendered exoticism of India. Eaton's writing and cover art relied on the aesthetics of the East as a way to help market her novels. Ali's depiction as sheik embodied an exoticism and Other that aligned him with Orientalist rhetoric. This dissertation also contributes to the rich body of scholarship that has moved beyond the black/white binary to showcase the strategies that were deployed by Asian American multiracials. While there has been a lot of work regarding contemporary representations of Asian American mixed race cultural producers like Tiger Woods and Keanu Reeves, current conversations about Asian American racial mixing and mixed race have been built upon early cultural producers like Hartmann, Eaton, Oberon, and Ali.³ The aim of this dissertation has been to show the ways in

³ Cynthia L. Nakashima, "Servants of Culture: The Symbolic Role of Mixed-Race Asians in American Discourse," in *The Sum of Our Parts: Mixed Heritage Asian Americans* eds. Teresa Williams-León and Cynthia L. Nakashima (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2001); Hiram Perez, "How

which Asian American cultural producers deployed strategies that enabled them to capitalize on their racial ambivalence to gain success.

I conclude with the reason that this research project began, which like many, is rooted in my own personal story. Growing up mixed race in the town of Santa Rosa, I inevitably got asked the question, “what are you?” To many people, I was either not Asian enough, or not white enough. These experiences of exclusion and articulations of difference are embodied in, and the reason for, the scholarly hyper-attention around the question “what are you?” within mixed race scholarship. It also represents the strong desire to place people within comprehensible racial categories. When I was younger, I never felt satisfied with my answer to the “what are you?” question. It was not until college that I acquired the vocabulary needed to formulate thoughtful responses that could accurately reflect my lived experience and identity. College also fostered my intellectual curiosity to envision and seek out mixed race peoples within historical narratives and the subsequent desire to uncover the rich history of Asian American mixed race. This first led me to pick up novels that featured mixed race protagonists like Sigrid Nunez’s *Feather on the Breath of God*, Shawn Wong’s *American Knees*, Brian Ascalon Roley’s *American Son*, and Ruth Ozeki’s *My Year of Meats*. While college gave me the language to speak about mixed race, these cultural texts dealt with the complexity of being Asian American mixed race and helped

to Rehabilitate a Mulatto: The Iconography of Tiger Woods,” in *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture*, eds. Shilpa Davé, LeiLani Nishime, and Tasha Oren (New York: New York UP, 2005); Jan R. Weisman, “The Tiger and His Stripes: Thai and American Reactions to Tiger Wood’s (Multi-) ‘Racial Self,’” in *The Sum of Our Parts: Mixed Heritage Asian Americans* eds. Teresa Williams-León and Cynthia L. Nakashima (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2001).

me understand that an Asian American mixed race identity did not need to be based on a deficiency or lack.

My experiences being Asian American mixed race has undoubtedly informed my research interest in the topic but my personal history and family story had never been incorporated as a component within my research or academic writing. However, as I began to write chapter three on Winnifred Eaton, I uncovered the connections between race, racial identity, and gardens. It was then I realized how much my own story was embedded in my research; whether I wanted to direct attention to its links or not, it was there. My father, Kenji is from Wakayama, Japan and immigrated to the United States when he was twelve. My grandfather had arrived in California earlier, working on farms before settling in Ukiah then sending for the rest of his family to come to California. My mother, Glynis, is from Eureka, California with a family history from Austria and Eastern Europe.

My father had dreams of graduating college and becoming an artist or marriage counselor. Instead, he continued the family landscaping business, his artwork mapped onto front yards in Sonoma and Napa County. His work evokes “Oriental design,” with an emphasis on rock gardens, waterfalls, and koi ponds. His choice to market the many iterations of his landscape businesses, from Nojima Landscaping, Kyoto Koi Garden Center, S&S Landscaping, to Sansui Landscaping, with a Japanese aesthetic and sensibility was fueled by both client demand for “authentic Japanese gardens” and his assumption that clients would see him as a Japanese gardener and would therefore connect his work with a high level of quality and an inherent ability to produce a Japanese style. This was coupled with the fact that many maintenance gardeners in the Bay Area in the 1980s were Japanese and my father (and his family) received referrals from these Japanese gardeners because they were one of the few

companies that had a landscaping contractor's license and could do design and landscape construction.

Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo's *Paradise Transplanted* reinforces my family's history within the broader historical context as she shows that unlike Chinese immigrants who went into laundry service, Japanese immigrants went into residential maintenance gardening because there was a demand for Oriental design and items, within their homes and extending into their yards, starting at the turn of the twentieth century. The first Japanese garden and teahouse was built for the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial International Exhibition and the Chicago's Fair followed suite in 1893, reinforcing the growing popularity and consumer demand of a Japanese aesthetic.⁴ By the 1930s maintenance gardening was tethered to being "a Japanese American man's job" on the west coast.⁵ This industry enabled "a suburban source of ethnic entrepreneurship and eventually the means of upward social mobility" for Japanese American men and their families.⁶

The story of my father connects to the broader notion of capitalizing on assumed abilities because of ethnic or racial identity. In his early career, my father did not have formal expertise or educational training in Oriental landscape design, but his clients assumed that his ethnic identity made him qualified. This was evident in the cultural producers in this dissertation as well. Most clearly, Hartmann's presumed expertise of European art was largely based on his German background and people gravitated to his lectures, not because he could tout credentials on those topics, but rather because people connected his knowledge to his ethnic identity. My father, like the four cultural producers in this dissertation, was a product of his socio-historical conditions, at times constrained by his racial identity but also able to strategically capitalize on his race.

⁴ Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Paradise Transplanted*, 54.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.

My family's story also expands beyond the traditional and conventional archive and denaturalizes what counts as archives. Oral histories, internet or digital databases, the materiality of the body, and the reading of tattoos all function as alternative types of archives and rich sources of knowledge.⁷ My father's archive is a garden, one where the evidence is grounded in the soil and sprouted with varietal flowers and ornate woodwork. Unlike the materials in an institutionalized archive, his is ephemeral and typically seasonal. These archives are not always acknowledged as sites that produce knowledge and the voices connected to these types of archives are not always the loudest ones heard or recorded in history. The types of cultural work that Hartmann, Eaton, Oberon, and Ali produced was and continues to be valued and acknowledged art. It is undoubtable that there are other Asian American mixed race cultural producers that move beyond singers, writers, or actors, those that have dedicated archives, and those that had printed cultural works. The archives like my father's represent alternative and more democratizing cultural works, with the potential to legitimize more voices and move the discussion beyond the cultural producers of Sadakichi Hartmann, Winnifred Eaton, Merle Oberon, and Bardu Ali.

However, these ephemeral archives like gardens, and even more broadly, farms, are precariously situated, under constant threat of erasure, particularly during moments in which groups are perceived as foreigners or threatening. Prior to World War II, newspapers depicted Japanese farmers as taking unused land or poor soil conditions and successfully planting orchards, gardens, and crops.⁸ But on the waves of anti-Japanese prejudice during World War II, Japanese American farmers were refigured as spies, suspected of sabotaging the United States.

⁷ Burton, *Archive Stories*, 3.

⁸ Lye, *America's Asia*, 157.

This resulted in a mass effort to remove Japanese American farmers and farmland, and the subsequent transfer of lands to government backed companies. In northern California, “nine farm corporations assumed 196 Japanese farms totaling 5,772 acres.”⁹ Once interned, Japanese Americans continued to cultivate the land. Yet the national historic site, Manzanar has few physical remnants of the thousands of Japanese Americans who were interned. In particular, the ways in which they created decorative rock gardens, formal Japanese gardens, and maintained trees and shrubs in the camps have faded, “now grown wild and unshapely from years of neglect.”¹⁰ While these stories shed light on how Japanese Americans attempted to find ways of belonging, the ephemerality of these archives reinforce a history of exclusion of peoples seen as perpetually foreign and reinforce the physical archives as a precarious type of database, one that can be erased and removed from memory.

This dissertation ends in the hopes that other future scholarship will see the potential to unpack alternative types of archives for Asian American mixed race individuals as well as the ways that subjects get positioned, misread, or disappeared as mixed race. This dissertation grapples with the boundaries of claiming and being mixed race, an identity predicated upon the blurriness of racial borders. While this dissertation engages with Eurasian cultural producers and scholarship of whiteness, Ali’s chapter begins to examine Asian multiracial subjects beyond those families who intermixed with whites, which constitutes an exciting turn in mixed race scholarship.¹¹ I am hopeful these voices will continue to be uncovered from various types of archives, adding to the depth and complexity of mixed race scholarship and history.

⁹ Ibid., 136.

¹⁰ Creef, *Imaging Japanese America*, 134.

¹¹ See Guevarra, *Becoming Mexipino*; Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*; Nitasha Tamar Sharma, *Hawai‘i is my Haven: Race and Indigeneity in the Black Pacific* (forthcoming).

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