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The Hidden History of Mestizo America

Gary B. Nash

La Nature aime les croisements (Nature loves cross-breedings).

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

On a dank January evening in London in 1617, the audience was distracted from a performance of Ben Jonson's *The Vision of Delight* by the persons sitting next to King James I and Queen Anne: a dashing adventurer who had just returned from the outer edge of the fledgling English empire and his new wife, ten years his junior. The king's guests were John Rolfe and his wife Rebecca—a name newly invented to anglicize the daughter of another king who ruled over a domain as big and populous as a north English county. She was Pocahontas, the daughter of Powhatan.¹ The first recorded interracial marriage in American history had taken place because Rebecca's father and the English leaders in the colony of Virginia were eager to bring about a détente after a decade of abrasive and sometimes bloody European-Algonkian contact on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay.

The Rolfe-Pocahontas marriage might have become the embryo of a mestizo United States.² I use the term mestizo in the original sense—referring to racial intermixture of all kinds. In the early seventeenth century, negative ideas about miscegenation had hardly formed; indeed, the word itself did not appear for another two and a half centuries. King James was not worried about interracial marriage. He fretted only about whether a commoner such as Rolfe was entitled

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¹ For historical accounts of the Pocahontas-Rolfe union, see, for example, Philip L. Barbour, *Pocahontas and Her World: A Chronicle of America's First Settlement in which Is Related the Story of the Indians and the Englishmen, Particularly Captain John Smith, Captain Samuel Argall, and Master John Rolfe* (Boston, 1970); Grace Steele Woodward, *Pocahontas* (Norman, 1969); and Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Settling with the Indians: The Meeting of English and Indian Cultures in America, 1580–1640* (Totowa, 1980).

² For the term "mestizo America" (which I have changed to mestizo United States to avoid equating the United States with the Americas), I am indebted to Brewton Berry, "America's Mestizos," in *The Blending of Races: Marginality and Identity in World Perspective*, ed. Noel P. Gist and Anthony G. Dworkin (New York, 1972).



Spanish colonizers of Mexico imported African slaves and used Indian labor. This *castas* (castes) painting, a Mexican genre of the eighteenth century, openly acknowledged the mixing of the three races and classified the progeny. *Courtesy National Institute of Anthropology and History, Mexico City, Mexico.*

to wed the daughter of a king. Nearly a century later, Robert Beverley's *History and Present State of Virginia* (1705) described Indian women as "generally beautiful, possessing uncommon delicacy of shape and features," and he regretted that Rolfe's intermarriage was not followed by many more.³

William Byrd, writing at the same time, was still commending what he called the "modern policy" of racial intermarriage employed in French Canada and Louisiana by which alliances rather than warfare were effected. Byrd confessed his preference for light-skinned women (a woman's skin color, however, rarely curbed his sexual appetite), but he was sure that English "false delicacy" blocked a "prudent alliance" that might have saved Virginians much tragedy. Most colonies saw no reason to ban intermarriage with Native Americans (North Carolina was the exception).⁴

In 1784, Patrick Henry nearly pushed through the Virginia legislature a law offering bounties for white-Indian marriages and free public education for interracial children. In the third year of his presidency, Thomas Jefferson pleaded "to let our settlements and theirs [Indians] meet and blend together, to intermix, and become one people." Six years later, just before returning to Monticello, Jefferson promised a group of western Indian chiefs, "you will unite yourselves with us, . . . and we shall all be Americans; you will mix with us by marriage, your blood will run in our veins, and will spread with us over this great island."⁵

In 1809, almost two hundred years after Pocahontas sat in the theater with James I, the sixteen-year-old Sam Houston, taking a page from the book of Benjamin Franklin, ran away from his autocratic older brothers. The teenage Franklin fled south from Boston to Philadelphia, but Houston made his way west from Virginia to Hiwassee Island in western Tennessee. There he took up life among the Cherokees and was soon adopted by Ooleteka, who would become the Cherokee chief in 1820. Reappearing in white society in 1818, Houston launched a tumultuous, alcohol-laced, violent, and roller-coaster political career, but he retained his yen for the Cherokee life. After his disastrous first marriage at age thirty-six, he rejoined the Cherokee, became the ambassador of the Cherokee nation to Washington (in which office he wore Indian regalia) in 1829, and married Ooleteka's niece, the widowed, mixed-blood Cherokee woman Tiana Rogers Gentry.⁶

³ The earliest known appearance of the word "miscegenation," defined as the "mixture of races [and] especially the sexual union of whites with Negroes," was in the title of a book by David Goodman Croly, *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro* (New York, 1984): *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed., s.v. "miscegenation." Robert Beverley, *History and Present State of Virginia*, ed. Louis B. Wright (Williamsburg, 1947), 159, 38–39.

⁴ William K. Boyd, ed., *William Byrd's Histories of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina* (Raleigh, 1929), 3–4. For colonial American attitudes toward white-African unions, see Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill, 1968), 136–78, 461–75; and Leon A. Higginbotham, *In the Matter of Color: Race and the American Legal Process* (New York, 1978).

⁵ Thomas Jefferson quoted in Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (Minneapolis, 1980), 83. Thomas Jefferson, "Advice to Indian Chiefs: To Captain Hendrick, the Delawares, Mohicans and Munries," Washington, Dec. 21, 1808, in *Thomas Jefferson: Letters and Addresses*, ed. William B. Parker (New York, 1908), 190.

⁶ Sam Houston's connection with the Cherokees is most thoroughly recounted in Jack Gregory and Rennard Strickland, *Sam Houston with the Cherokees, 1829–1833* (Austin, 1967). For Houston's relationships with Indian women, see *ibid.*, 82–87, 106–7.



It was Sam Houston's custom to dress in full Indian regalia while he was in Washington as a tribal ambassador for the Cherokee nation in 1829.

Courtesy San Jacinto Museum of History, Houston, Texas.

Until recently, official biographies of Houston omitted this Cherokee marriage. His drunken arrogance soon led to exile from the Cherokee nation, where he had been known as "the big drunk"; he left his Cherokee wife and headed for Texas to fight and speculate his way to fame. In 1836, as president of Texas, Houston convinced Chief Bowles, leader of the numerous Cherokees who had migrated there, to cast their lot with the provisional American government against the

armed and dissatisfied Mexican residents. Houston hoped to cement an alliance between Cherokees and whites that would combine Texas and northern Mexico into a vast territory with plenty of land both for a new Cherokee homeland and for Anglo-Texan settlers. After all, the Cherokees had fought alongside Andrew Jackson, Houston's friend, against the Creeks in the battle of Horseshoe Bend near New Orleans—the climactic battle in the War of 1812.⁷

In both Virginia and Texas, prejudice and violence blocked the way toward what might have become a mixed-race American republic. Pocahontas died after boarding ship in England in 1617—bound for Virginia—with Rolfe and their infant son. With his mixed-race son, Rolfe reached Virginia, married again in 1620, and two years later died in an all-out assault mounted by Opechancanough, the half-brother of Pocahontas's father. This attack killed off one-third of the tobacco planters, and intermarriage in Virginia thereafter was a rarity.⁸

Two centuries later, after Houston worked to protect the Cherokees from white settler racism and violence in Texas, his successor as president of the Lone Star Republic, Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar, called for a policy of Cherokee expulsion or extinction. In 1839, when the Texas army attacked the defiant Cherokees, Houston's old friend Chief Bowles died holding a sword inscribed by Houston. On the battlefield, a Cherokee warrior removed a metal canister held by a cord around Chief Bowles's neck that contained the treaty, drafted and signed by Houston, that guaranteed the Cherokee lands in Texas forever.⁹

Other forerunners of a mestizo nation were more successful. English, French, and Spanish fur traders in North America, from the early 1600s to the late 1800s, were typically married to Indian women. They became the very symbol of mestizo America—*métissage* is the French term (comparable to the Spanish *mestizaje*) for the joining of English or French traders and their Indian wives, and their offspring were *métis*.¹⁰ Irish trader John Johnson could hardly have done business in Indian villages without his Ojibway wife O-shaw-gus-co-day-wayquak, daughter of an Ojibway leader. Nor could Michael Laframboise, a French immigrant, whose Okanogay wife paved the way for his trading with the Indians in Oregon Territory. Laframboise boasted about having a high-ranking wife in every Indian tribe inhab-

⁷ A more recent biographical account of Houston, which also documents his Cherokee relationships, is Marshall De Bruhl, *Sword of San Jacinto: A Life of Sam Houston* (New York, 1993), esp. 105–41.

⁸ J. Frederick Fausz, "An 'Abundance of Blood Shed on Both Sides': England's First Indian War, 1609–1614," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 98 (Jan. 1990), 3–56.

⁹ De Bruhl, *Sword of San Jacinto*, 264.

¹⁰ For general treatments of racial blending, see Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (New York, 1980); Albert Murray, *The Omni-Americans: New Perspectives on Black Experience and American Culture* (New York, 1970); Paul Spikard, *Mixed Blood: Intermarriage and Ethnic Identity in Twentieth Century America* (Madison, 1989); and Maria P. P. Root, ed., *Racially Mixed People in America* (Newbury Park, 1992). On European-Indian intermarriage, see, for example, Jacqueline Peterson, "Women Dreaming: The Religiopsychology of Indian White Marriages and the Rise of a Metis Culture," in *Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives*, ed. Lillian Schlissel, Vicki L. Ruiz, and Janice Monk (Albuquerque, 1988), 49–68; and John Mack Faragher, "The Custom of the Country: Cross-Cultural Marriage in the Far Western Fur Trade," *ibid.*, 199–215. For an introduction to the growing literature on the Métis, particularly on people of mixed Indian and European descent identifying themselves collectively as distinct from both Indian and White communities, see Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S. H. Brown, eds., *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America* (Winnipeg, 1985).



Joseph Rolette, who represented the Pembina Métis in the Minnesota territorial legislature during the 1850s, is dressed here in classic Métis fashion.

His European hat, tie, and coat and Indian pants, moccasins, and tobacco pouch symbolize his mixed-race identity.

Anonymous artist. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.

iting the region he worked as a trapper. He was apparently the only man “who moved with solitary security from one Umpqua village to another.” The fabled Jim Bridger married three times, each time to an Indian woman, once to the daughter of Chief Washakie of the Shoshone. Equally fabled Kit Carson had four wives: an Arapaho, a Cheyenne, a Mexican, and a Taos-born Indian-Mexican woman.¹¹

The fur traders, trappers, and trail blazers are poignant examples of a frontier that should be conceptualized as a zone of deep intercultural contacts rather than as a line that divided two societies, one advanced and the other primitive. The frontier, as it involved white settlers and native peoples, is indelibly etched in our national consciousness as a battleground, but it was also a cultural merging ground and a marrying ground. Nobody left the frontier cultural encounters unchanged.¹²

Two further examples of *mestizaje*, one from the nineteenth century and one from the twentieth, illustrate the “in-betweenness” of many who confounded the official racial taxonomy of the United States. The first example is in the mixing of American Indians and African Americans. In every part of eastern North America from the 1600s to the 1800s, escaping African slaves sought refuge among Native Americans, relying on a natural affinity between oppressed peoples. White colonists, fearing an alliance of red and Black peoples, strenuously promoted hatred between Indians and Africans, offering bounties to Indians who captured escaping Africans and trying to convince Indians that Africans were a detestable people. Nonetheless, the blood lines of Cherokees and Mandingo, Creeks and Fula, Choc-taws and Ashanti became mixed as fugitive slaves disappeared into Indian society. The Africans took Indian spouses, produced children of mixed blood, and contributed to Afro-Indian transculturation.¹³

The revolutionary era was neatly bracketed by two Afro-Indians. The first blood shed, in the Boston Massacre of 1774, was that of Crispus Attucks, whose father was Black and his mother Indian. In the aftermath of the Revolution, it was Paul Cuffe, son of an African father and Wampanoag mother, who planned the repatriation of Black Yankees to Sierra Leone after concluding that it was nearly

¹¹ For John Johnson, see Faragher, “Custom of the Country.” Doyce B. Nunis Jr., “Michael Laframboise,” in *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West: Biographical Sketches of the Participants by Scholars of the Subject and with Introductions by the Editor*, ed. LeRoy R. Hafen (Glendale, 1968), 147. Gene Caesar, *King of the Mountain Men: The Life of Jim Bridger* (New York, 1961); Faragher, “Custom of the Country.” For an account of Kit Carson’s marriages, see, for example, Thelma S. Guild and Harvey L. Carter, *Kit Carson: A Pattern for Heroes* (Lincoln, 1984), 69, 95, 106–7, 168.

¹² See, for example, William R. Swagerty, “Marriage and Settlement Patterns of Rocky Mountain Trappers and Traders,” *Western Historical Quarterly*, 11 (April 1980), 159–80; Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge, 1991); and Patricia Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York, 1987).

¹³ For historical accounts of Afro-Indian intercultural contact, see Kenneth W. Porter, *The Negro on the American Frontier* (New York, 1971); Richard Halliburton Jr., *Red over Black: Black Slavery among the Cherokee Indians* (Westport, 1977); Theda Perdue, *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society, 1540–1866* (Knoxville, 1979); Daniel F. Littlefield, *Africans and Creeks from the Colonial Period to the Civil War* (Westport, 1976); and Jack D. Forbes, *Black Africans and Native Americans: Color, Race, and Caste in the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (Oxford, 1988).

impossible for New England's Blacks to find a life of liberty and happiness in the new republic.¹⁴

Up and down the seaboard, Indian-African intermixing continued. The whaling boat crews of Nantucket Island had many African-Indians, including the harpooners celebrated by Herman Melville. On the peninsula comprising Delaware, eastern Maryland, and eastern Virginia, deep-rooted mixtures of red, white, and Black peoples created triracial communities. Still today, from Alabama to New York, the Lumbees, Red Bones, Wesorts, Brass Ankles, and many other triracial societies maintain their distinctive identities.¹⁵

African-Indian intermixture was furthered by the Cherokee adoption of Black slavery, which grew slowly in the eighteenth century but increased rapidly in the early nineteenth century when the Cherokee strategy for survival staked its future on adopting key white institutions: a constitution, literacy, family farming, Christianity—and Black slavery. By the 1830s, about one-fourth of all Cherokees were intermixed, mostly with whites but many with Blacks. Chulio, the famous Cherokee chief and warrior, married three times, first a Cherokee, then a white woman, finally one of his Black slave women. The Cherokee attempts to protect their homelands extended even to passing a law in 1824 forbidding intermarriage with African Americans, but this did not stop Black-Cherokee liaisons. Today, many thousands of Americans claim both African and Cherokee descent.¹⁶

A second example of *mestizaje* can be found in the history of agriculture in California's San Joaquin and Imperial valleys. In the early twentieth century, the landowners of the flourishing agricultural industry were no longer able to bring in new Chinese and Japanese contract laborers because of immigration restrictions. The cotton, fruit, and vegetable growers turned to Korea, the Philippines, and South Asia for labor. Among the immigrants were nearly seven thousand Sikhs from the Punjab. Arriving as single men or as married men who could not bring their wives and children, the Punjabis faced the creeping glacier of anti-miscegenation that left them in a racial catch-22: they could not bring Sikh women with them, and California law prohibited marriage between people of different races, as races were defined in this period. By the end of World War I, however, the Sikhs were finding that county clerks would issue marriage licenses to people of different "races" so long as they had a similar skin color. This softness in the application of the law soon led to marriages between Punjabis and Mexicans, who

¹⁴ See Lamont D. Thomas, *Rise to Be a People: A Biography of Paul Cuffe* (Urbana, 1986).

¹⁵ William S. Pollitzer, "The Physical Anthropology and Genetics of Marginal People of the Southeastern United States," *American Anthropologist*, 74 (June 1972), 719–34; Joseph Douglas Deal, *Race and Class in Colonial Virginia: Indians, Englishmen, and Africans during the Seventeenth Century* (Ann Arbor, 1981); Brewton Berry, *Almost White: A Study of Certain Racial Hybrids in the Eastern United States* (New York, 1963); and K. I. Blu, *The Lumbee Problem: The Making of an American Indian People* (New York, 1980).

¹⁶ One of the latest of many studies on social and cultural Cherokee transformation after the American Revolution is William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance in the New Republic* (Princeton, 1986), esp. 67–70, 331–39, 343–45. Cherokee Advocate Office, *Laws Of The Cherokee Nation: Adopted By The Council At Various Periods, Printed For The Benefit Of The Nation* (1852; Wilmington, 1973), 38. For an example of African Americans who became Indian without actually mixing their blood, see Kevin Mulroy, *Freedom on the Border: The Seminole Maroons in Florida, the Indian Territory, Coahuila, and Texas* (Lubbock, 1993).

had been crossing the border in large numbers since the Mexican Revolution of 1911.¹⁷

Between 1913 and 1949—the latter date the abrogation of California’s law prohibiting racial intermarriage—80 percent of the Asian Indian men in California married Hispanic women. To this day, several thousand of the children and grandchildren of these Punjabi-Hispanic marriages, which involved vows between Muslims and Catholics or Hindus and Catholics, can be found in Imperial Valley and San Joaquin valley towns. Many of the families can still be found under the name Singh—the most common Sikh surname—but most have Hispanic first names, representing the mixed cultural heritage that emerged. Hindu temples and Muslim mosques can be found all over the San Joaquin and Imperial valleys. What an exclamation point this hybridizing of people adds to Frederick Jackson Turner’s dictum that “In the crucible of the frontier the immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race, English in neither nationality nor characteristics.” (Since the new immigration law of 1965, California’s population of Asian Indians has grown from a few thousand to over a hundred thousand, which has reconstituted and revitalized Punjabi culture and identity. Tension between the new Punjabis and Hispanic-Punjabi people has arisen in San Joaquin Valley cities; thus begins again the process of “contesting and negotiating ethnic identity within marriages, within families, and in arenas beyond the family,” as Karen Leonard has written.)¹⁸

The numbers of Mexican-Asian Indian Californians involved are not very significant, but they represent a powerful theme in American history that has been largely hidden—that people of many kinds, in every era and in every region of this country, have found loopholes in the ruling system of racial division and classification.¹⁹ The silence in our history books on the topic of multiraciality reflects the antimiscegenist attitudes supported by the law. In fact, about three-quarters of African Americans today are multiracial, and perhaps one-third have some Indian ancestry. Virtually all Latino Americans are multiracial, so are almost all Filipino Americans, so are a large majority of American Indians, and millions of whites have multiracial roots.²⁰

Far more common than is generally recognized are interracial marriages that resulted in pivotal chapters of American history. Such is the case of Lucy and Albert Parsons. Born in Buffalo Creek, Texas, in 1853, Lucy Gonzalez, whose heritage was Black and Creek as well as Mexican, married Albert Parsons, who had been a Confederate scout in the Civil War. In marrying Lucy Gonzalez in

¹⁷ Karen Isaksen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California’s Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia, 1992).

¹⁸ Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” reprinted in *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner*, ed. John Mack Faragher (New York, 1994), 47. Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*, 203. For widespread racial intermarriage of Mexican Americans, see Peter Skerry, *Mexican-Americans: The Ambivalent Minority* (New York, 1993).

¹⁹ See, for another example, Marilyn Halter, *Between Race and Ethnicity: Cape Verdean American Immigrants, 1860–1965* (Urbana, 1993).

²⁰ Root, ed., *Racially Mixed People in America*, 9. In 1918, the U.S. Census Bureau accepted the estimate that three of every four Black Americans were of mixed ancestry: see Williamson, *New People*, 111.

1871, Parsons turned his back on his brother, editor of a white supremacist newspaper in Texas. William Parsons, at about the same time, expressed his disgust for “the *mongrel results* which have so universally attended emancipation, and the fraternization of the races throughout the Spanish Republics of the two American Continents.” From this interracial marriage came two racially mixed children but also one of the most dramatic stories in labor history. Lucy and Albert joined the Socialist Labor party and became leading activists in Chicago in the 1877 railroad strike. Ten years later, Albert was executed as one of the anarchists inciting the Haymarket Square riot in Chicago in 1886. But Lucy, a spellbinding speaker with flashing eyes and a trenchant pen, carried forth the radical labor message for another fifty-five years until she died in the 1940s. She is listed in Hispanic and Black American biographical indexes—under different names. In *Black Women in America*, she is listed as “Lucy Parsons”: the “first Black woman to play a prominent role in the American Left,” although her triracial heritage is acknowledged. In *Mexican American Biographies*, she is listed as “Lucía Gonzalez Parsons,” under *G*.²¹

This brings us to a consideration of the virulent racial ideology that arose among the dominant Euro-Americans and that profoundly affected people of color. How most Americans came to believe that character and culture are literally carried in the blood, and how the idea of racial mixture was almost banished officially, has its own history. How would it come to happen, as Barbara Fields has expressed it, that a white woman can give birth to a Black child but a Black woman can never give birth to a white child?²² How would it come to be that the children of Indian-white marriages would contemptuously be referred to by whites as half-breeds?

The sequence of legal definitions of Blacks in Virginia demonstrates this progression. In 1785, the revolutionary generation defined a Black person as anyone with a Black parent or grandparent, thus conferring whiteness on whomever was less than one-quarter Black. Virginia changed the law 125 years later to define as “Negro,” as the term then was used, anyone who was at least one-sixteenth Black. In 1930, Virginia adopted the notorious “one-drop” law—defining as Black anyone with one drop of African blood, however that might have been determined.

A comparison of the early histories of Spanish and English colonizers in this hemisphere is instructive. In Spanish America from the time of the Columbian voyages, Spanish males, living overwhelmingly without Spanish women, began to mix with indigenous women. This was especially facilitated by *repartimento*, by which Indian peoples were made subject to Spanish conquerors and brought into close contact as tribute laborers. Through concubinage and intermarriage, Indian women became enmeshed in Spanish life, and their mestizo offspring were

²¹ William Parsons quoted in Carolyn Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary* (Chicago, 1976), 13. Darlene Clark Hine, ed., *Black Women in America* (2 vols., Brooklyn, 1993), II, 909–10. Matt S. Meier, *Mexican American Biographies: A Historical Dictionary, 1836–1987* (New York, 1988), 96–97.

²² Barbara J. Fields, “Ideology and Race in American History,” in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York, 1982), 149.

usually recognized for exactly what they were—mixed-race children. Mestizos, outnumbering Spaniards in New Spain as early as 1650, were to play a large role in the later stages of colonization and conquest. Today most of the Mexican population is mestizo—testimony to the early assimilation of much of the Indian population.²³

The history of Spanish-African mixing is similar. The Spanish brought enslaved Africans to their colonies much earlier than did the English in North America, and they brought Africans in larger numbers proportionate to the European population. The Africans served as artisans and supervisors of Native American slaves, which gave many of them a status much above that of the field laborer. And in the relative absence of Spanish women, Spanish-African intermixing flourished.²⁴

Thus, the demographic and economic factors arising out of the Spanish colonizing experience, prompted by incessant contact with dark-skinned Muslims over centuries of Islamic expansion into Spain, created continuous racial blending and a mingled civilization. With no prohibitions against interracial contact and interracial marriage, Spanish, African, and Indian people became extensively intermixed.

A series of family portraits produced in Mexico in the eighteenth century provides a fascinating record of the grafting of racial backgrounds onto the Enlightenment passion for classification as well as its keen interest in the human condition. This genre of paintings, known as “Las Castas,” marked the first time that Mexican artists chose to represent their own surroundings rather than using European models; some consider this body of paintings a self-portrait of Mexican society. On the other hand, the most important clientele for “Las Castas” were Spanish visitors who wanted to take a Mexican souvenir back to Europe. Exoticism, therefore, may have played a role. Nonetheless, these paintings provide an important glimpse into the everyday life of eighteenth-century Mexico. María Concepción García Sáiz has recovered a total of fifty-nine series of the “caste paintings,” which she has determined to be the work of seven artists. She expects with further research to be able to complete the series, bringing the total number of known caste paintings to one thousand.²⁵

Las Castas provide a carefully delineated classification scheme for the various kinds and degrees of racial mingling. A Spanish and Indian couple, for example, had a mestizo child. Mestizo and Spanish mates produced castizo children. African and Spanish parents created mulatto children. The offspring of Spanish and mulatto was a morisco. The child of morisco and Spanish was a chino, or albino. A chino

²³ Literature on Spanish-Indian relations in the New World includes Magnus Mörner, *Race Mixture in the History of Latin America* (Boston, 1967); Marvin Harris, *Patterns of Race in the Americas* (New York, 1964); and Colin MacKay MacLachlan, *The Forging of the Cosmic Race: A Reinterpretation of Colonial Mexico* (Berkeley, 1980).

²⁴ See, for example, Colin A. Palmer, *Slaves of the White God: Blacks in Mexico, 1570–1650* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976).

²⁵ See María Concepción García Sáiz, *Las castas Mexicanas: Un genero pictorico americano* (The Mexican castes: A painting genre) ([Milan], 1989); and Nicolas Leon, *Las Castas del Mexico Colonial o Nueva España* (The castes of colonial Mexico or New Spain) (n.p., 1924).



Marriage between a Spanish woman and an African man produced both a mulatto child and a serene domestic environment in this caste painting.

Reprinted from María Concepción García Sáiz, *Las castas Mexicanas: Un género pictórico americano*, 226.

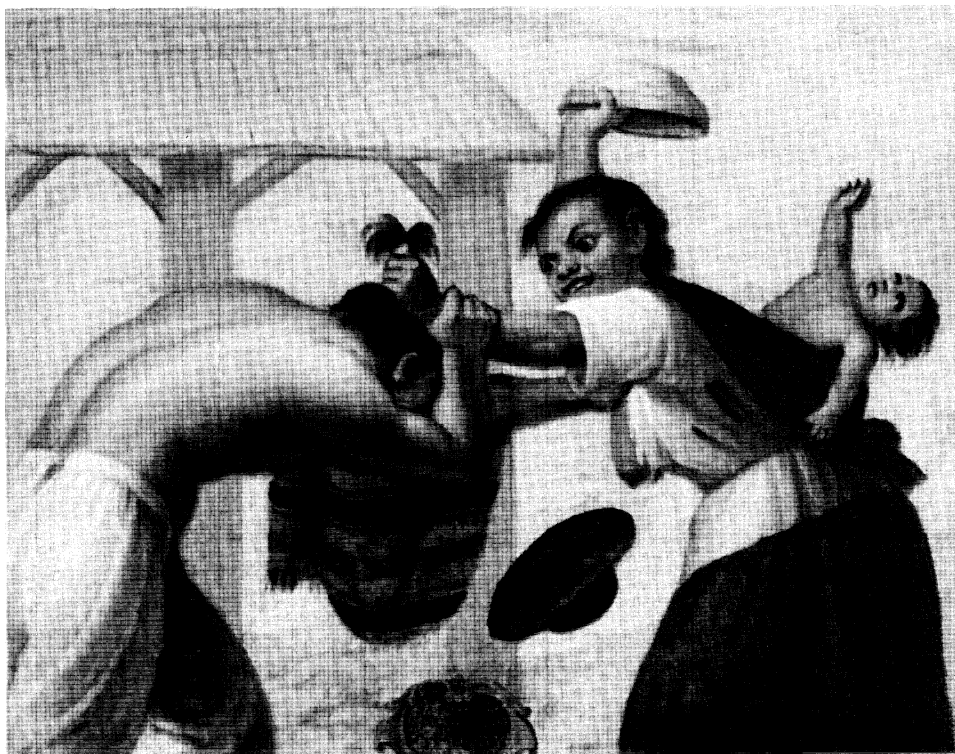
and Indian pair had a child that was termed *salta atrás*, literally, to jump back (away from Spanish blood). And so forth, even to the point of racial entanglements so perplexing that the resulting persons were *tente en el aire*, “you grope in the air,” or *no te entiendo*, “I don’t get you”—a mixing of blood impossible to unscramble.²⁶

It is foolish to overromanticize this mixing of blood. On the positive side, the caste paintings of interracial families—mostly portrayed in serene domestic and workaday settings—invited tolerance, common compassion, and some understanding of “the fundamental cohesion of the human race.”²⁷ Surely the widespread distribution of these caste paintings spread the notion in Spain, where many of the paintings are found today, that interracial mixing was not repugnant; it was rather the natural human mingling that occurred when three worlds met.

Yet the caste paintings also tell us of the careful attention to racial distinctions that discloses the Spaniards’ sense of racial superiority. They portray what has been called a “pigmentocratic system,” in which social and economic status de-

²⁶ García Sáiz, *Castas Mexicanas*, 24–29.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.



This caste painting of a violent mulatto woman attacking her coyote mestizo husband seems to warn against racial intermixture. The child of this union, labeled “Ahí te estás,” or “Stay where you are,” is evidently expected to carry out her parents’ discord in similarly threatening behavior.

Reprinted from María Concepción García Sáiz, *Las castas Mexicanas: Un genero pictorico americano*, 229.

pended largely on skin color.²⁸ Moreover, some caste paintings registered domestic discord, and they are especially revealing in associating marital turbulence with the mixing of African and Indian bloodstreams, whereas the dark-skinned African or Indian who married a Spaniard could count on a child with a favorable temperament. In one *castas* series, for example, one painting is inscribed, “In the Americas people of different colours, customs, temperaments, and languages are born: Born of the Spaniard and the Indian woman is a Mestizo, who is generally humble, tranquil and straightforward.” Another painting proclaims, “The pride and sharp wits of the Mulatto are instilled by his white father and black mother.” But in another family portrait, “the Jibaro born of Indian mother and Calpamulato father is restless and almost always arrogant”; in yet another, “from Lobo and Indian woman, the Cambujo is usually slow, lazy, and cumbersome.”²⁹

²⁸ The term “pigmentocratic system” is used in Magnus Mörner, *Race Mixture*, 54; Mörner adapted it from the word “pigmentocracy,” first used in Alejandro Lipshütz, *El indoamericanismo y el problema racial en las Américas* (Indian-Americanism and the racial problem in the Americas) (Santiago de Chile, 1944), 75.

²⁹ García Sáiz, *Castas Mexicanas*, 103–11.

In British American colonies, we can find no such pictures acknowledging racially mixed families or classifying them by degrees of mixture. Indeed, artists and publishers of such caste paintings would probably have been expelled from colonial towns (while going broke). The reason is not that racial intermingling was emotionally or sensuously unacceptable; rather it was ideologically repugnant. Male settlers had strong objections not to sexual relations (most often coercive) with African women, but to giving the offspring of such interracial liaisons a half- or partway status in society.³⁰ Also, English males, coming largely with families or with access to European females, had little compulsion to consort with Native American women. Nor, in the main, were English colonizers powerful enough to subject the Native American peoples or to extract tribute labor from them. In English North America, a very different demographic, economic, and ideological context planted the seeds of the racial binary thinking that became the basis of what has been called a white *Herrenvolk* democracy.³¹

The master ideology of the North American master class was not uncontested, however. Largely unnoticed by historians were many people who conducted their lives, formed families, raised children, and created their own identities in ways that defied the official racial ideology. Originating with the first interracial encounters, the mestizo counter-ideology stood in constant, shifting tension with the doctrine of racial purity. Most of its adherents were people who issued no tracts, passed no laws, and preached no sermons, but they announced their ideas, values, and racial preferences with their feet. Some of these racial boundary jumpers were the so-called white Indians, such as John Hunter, who grew up among the Kickapoos, Kansas, and Osages. Several thousand Americans who were captured by Indians in white-Indian warfare chose to remain in Indian society. To the horror of white cultural leaders, many married there. Precious few Indians took the reverse route of choosing to remain in white society after exposure to it. Crèvecoeur, in his celebrated *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), wrote of the Indians, "There must be in their social bond something singularly captivating, and far superior to anything to be boasted of among us; for thousands of Europeans are Indians, and we have no examples of even one of those aborigines having from choice become Europeans."³²

³⁰ Jordan, *White over Black*, 167–78.

³¹ The term "white herrenvolk democracy" was adapted by George Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (New York, 1971), 61, from its originator, the sociologist Pierre L. van den Berghe, *Race and Racism: A Comparative Perspective* (New York, 1967), 17–18.

³² Richard Drinnon, *White Savage: The Case of John Dunn Hunter* (New York, 1972), 7–8. On "Indianization" of European colonists, see Alden T. Vaughan and Daniel K. Richter, "Crossing the Cultural Divide: Indians and New Englanders, 1605–1763," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 90 (part 1, 1980), 23–99; Marius Barbeau, "Indian Captivities," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 94 (Dec. 1950), 522–48; A. Irving Hallowell, "American Indians, White and Black: The Phenomenon of Transculturalization," *Current Anthropology*, 4 (Dec. 1963), 519–31; J. Norman Heard, *White into Red: A Study of the Assimilation of White Persons Captured by Indians* (Metuchen, 1973); and James Axtell, "The White Indians of Colonial America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 32 (Jan. 1975), 55–88. J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (New York, 1957), 208–9.

Also confounding the ideology of racial separation was an American universalism that posited “a social vision and a definition of nationhood” that grounded “public life and institutions not on an exclusive heritage but on natural rights.”³³ The American revolutionists abandoned this Enlightenment universalism when they backed away from what they knew was the impossibility of creating a free republic based on inalienable rights while they perpetuated slave labor. Despite this massive contradiction, which has disfigured all subsequent American history, the belief persisted, at least in some quarters, that the fusion of peoples across ethnic and racial lines could produce a more vigorous society. Two generations after the Revolution, Herman Melville proclaimed in *Redburn* (1849), “You can not spill a drop of American blood without spilling the blood of the whole world. . . . On this Western Hemisphere all tribes and people are forming into one federated whole.” In *The Confidence Man*, Melville’s shadowy figure asks: “What are you? What am I? Nobody knows who anybody is.”³⁴

Most white Americans had no intention of federating across racial lines and were doing their best to discourage such commingling. Yet Melville’s vision commanded considerable respect. Boston’s Ralph Waldo Emerson echoed it: “a new compound more precious than any” is being melded into an “asylum of all nations” where “the energy of Irish, Germans, Swedes, Poles, & Cossacks, & all the European tribes—of the Africans, & of the Polynesians, will construct a new race as vigorous as the new Europe which came out of the smelting pot of the Dark Ages.” Wendell Phillips, the thundering abolitionist from Boston, approvingly spoke of “The United States of the United Races” in 1853; he dwelt on the same point in 1863 when the nation was immersed in a cataclysmic bloodletting. The intensely Christian Phillips envisioned an alchemical laboratory for a new and extraordinarily vital race. He imagined “the melting of the Negro into the various races that congregate on the continent” in “gradual and harmonizing union, in honorable marriage. In my nationality,” he proclaimed, “there is but one idea—the harmonious and equal mingling of all races. No nation ever became great which was born of one blood.”³⁵

The power of these cosmopolitan proclamations might have found their rendezvous with destiny on January 1, 1863, when Abraham Lincoln’s emancipation proclamation unshackled four million Black Americans. But the promise of cashing in the revolutionary generation’s promissory note crumbled before a stiff-backed white national consciousness that gathered momentum in the late nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century, the white middle and upper classes in

³³ John Higham, “Multiculturalism and Universalism: A History and Critique,” *American Quarterly*, 45 (no. 2, 1993), 197.

³⁴ Herman Melville, *Redburn: His First Voyage, Being the Sailor-Boy Confessions and Reminiscences of the Son-of-a-Gentleman, in the Merchant Service* (Evanston, 1969), 169. Herman Melville, *The Confidence Man: His Masquerade* (1857; New York, 1954), 216.

³⁵ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Emerson in His Journals*, ed. Joel Porte (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), 347. Wendell Phillips, “The United States of the United Races,” *National Era*, 7 (Sept. 1853), 146, the 1863 passage is quoted in Gilbert Osofsky, “Wendell Phillips and the Quest for a New American Identity,” *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* (Charlottetown), 1 (Fall 1973), 37–39.

the United States began to retreat to exclusive suburbs, indulge in a fetish of genealogy, and invent a comforting history of Anglo-Saxonism. At the same time, anthropometric studies stood Wendell Phillips's idea of a cosmopolitan intermixed race on its head. From an outpouring of purportedly scientific research, Americans learned that racial mixing produced sterile and anemic offspring that would lead American society toward a Darwinian fate of racial unfitness. In this way, studies of race bulwarked the racial ideology of the period, "greatly strengthening popular prejudice by clothing it," as one historian has written, "in the mantle of academic and scientific authority."³⁶

In the early twentieth century, racial intermingling dropped precipitously as a new white orthodoxy depicted mixed-race people as degenerate and racial amalgamation as a prescription for national suicide. Frenzied opposition to racial intermarriage reached its height as the eugenics movement, which referred to racial mixing in such terms as hybrid degeneracy and mongrelization, swept the country. Paradoxically, this occurred in the so-called Progressive Era, a label that we can see has its own peculiarities. The herald of the eugenics movement was an eastern establishment lawyer who bore the name of two presidents. Madison Grant was reared at Yale and Columbia and became, avocationally, a traveler, writer, and zoologist. His special passion was in preserving the treasures of America: the buffalo, the redwoods, and the white race. Gunnar Myrdal would later call him "the high priest of racialism in America." In *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), Grant brought to fever pitch the white fear that the intellectual and moral attainments of the white race would be destroyed by racial intermixing. The progeny of mixed union would inevitably degenerate to the lower type. "The cross between white and Indian is an Indian," he wrote; "the cross between a white man and a Negro is a Negro; the cross between a white man and a Hindu is a Hindu; the cross between any of the three European races and a Jew is a Jew."³⁷

The Progressives were notably unprogressive on the topic of racial fusion; their "melting pot" ideal was limited to Americanizing the European immigrants and had nothing to do with racial mixing. But at least some on their radical wing kept alive the idea of a federated, transnational, transracial democratic culture. Some colleges launched courses on race relations, and social scientists, led by

³⁶ John G. Mencke, *Mulattoes and Race Mixture: American Attitudes and Images, 1865-1918* (Ann Arbor, 1979), 99.

³⁷ Historical accounts of the eugenics movement include George Fredrickson, *The Arrogance of Race: Historical Perspectives on Slavery, Racism, and Social Inequality* (Middletown, 1988); William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America, 1815-1859* (Chicago, 1960); and George W. Stocking, *Race, Culture and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York, 1968). For a historical account of nativism in the Progressive Era, see, for example, John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, 1955). For racism in the Progressive Era, see, for example, Ray Stannard Baker, *Following the Color Line: American Negro Citizenship in the Progressive Era* (New York, 1964); John Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (Urbana, 1977); and Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, eds., *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington, 1991). Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (2 vols., New York, 1944), I, 114. Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916; New York, 1921), 17-18; quoted in Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 114.

Robert E. Park at the University of Chicago, began studying the cultures of ethnic minorities. From this research came a model of stages of cultural interaction that in theory led relentlessly to racial amalgamation.³⁸

The clarion voice of mestizo America belonged to a brilliant young Anglo-Saxon man of letters whose twisted body contained a gigantic mind. Writing in 1916, Randolph Bourne—a contemporary of Madison Grant—told of “hard-hearted old Brahmins virtuously indignant at the spectacle of the immigrant refusing to be melted,” as World War I brought to the surface “vigorous nationalistic and cultural movements in this country.” Thoroughly Brahmin himself in background, Bourne preached that the nation would never achieve greatness and never build on its own founding principles by washing out of its immigrant masses all that they came from and all they wished to preserve. The melting pot, Bourne charged, was a failure as a program for Anglo-Saxon cultural conversion; American nationalism could find its destiny as internationalism. In fact, he argued “we have all unawares been building up the first international nation.”³⁹

As World War I was raging, Bourne was already celebrating a polycentric American culture in which cultural identity would become “based partly on descent and partly on consent.” This “transnationality,” wrote Bourne, would be “a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors. Any movement which attempts to thwart this weaving, or to dye the fabric any one color, or disentangle the threads of the strands, is false to this cosmopolitan vision.” Bourne addressed the question of race gingerly, although he welcomed the “migratory [Mexican] alien who has lived with us and caught the pioneer spirit and a sense of new social vistas.” But he was extraordinary in an era when race relations reached their nadir in American history. Though his bloodlines were intensely Anglo-Saxon, Bourne burned with conviction that the nation would impoverish itself if Anglo-Saxon obsessionism sucked the essence out of the varied American peoples. “He, if anyone, in the days to come,” wrote Van Wyck Brooks, “would have conjured out of our dry soil the green shoots of a beautiful and a characteristic literature; he knew that soil so well, and why it was dry, and how it ought to be irrigated.”⁴⁰ The modern American identity could never be reduced to a single monochromatic lineage. Instead, the cultural identity of Americans had to be repeatedly reformed and refashioned as people of different backgrounds,

³⁸ See R. Fred Wacker, *Ethnicity, Pluralism, and Race: Race Relations Theory in America before Myrdal* (Westport, 1983); and Henry Yu, “Thinking about Orientals: Modernity, Social Science, and Asians in Twentieth-Century America” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1995), 78–91.

³⁹ Randolph S. Bourne, “Trans-National America,” *Atlantic Monthly*, 118 (July 1916), reprinted in Randolph S. Bourne, *War and the Intellectuals: Essays, 1915–1919*, ed. Carl Resek (New York, 1964), 107. *Ibid.*, 117. For secondary literature on Randolph Bourne, see Leslie J. Vaughn, “Cosmopolitanism, Ethnicity and American Identity: America” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1995), 443–59; Bruce Clayton, *Forgotten Prophet: The Life of Randolph Bourne* (Baton Rouge, 1984); and Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York, 1986). For collections of Bourne’s own writings, see Olaf Hansen, ed., *The Radical Will: Selected Writings of Randolph Bourne, 1911–1918* (New York, 1977); and Bourne, *War and the Intellectuals*, ed. Resek.

⁴⁰ Vaughn, “Cosmopolitanism, Ethnicity, and American Identity,” 452. Bourne, “Trans-National America,” 121. Van Wyck Brooks quoted in John Adam Moreau, *Randolph Bourne: Legend and Reality* (Washington, 1966), 205.

ancestral roots, and cultural leanings came into contact with each other, both inside and outside of marriage.

Bourne died in the 1918 influenza epidemic at age 32. What nearly died with him were hopes for transcending Anglo-Saxonism and also transcending a cultural pluralism that envisioned a United States full of durable ethnic blocs. A militant nationalism, fed by fears of revolutionary bolshevism in Russia, now coursed through the nation. After World War I, criminalization of dissent, deportation of aliens, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, and a sudden slamming shut of the doors of immigration gave resonance to the trumpet of Madison Grant rather than to that of Randolph Bourne.

Bourne's transnational America would have to await another world war and a Cold War that followed it. In the interwar era, an even more utopian vision of a thoroughly intermixed cosmic race was promoted by the Mexican José Vasconcelos and by the French anthropologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. But these visionaries, eerily echoing Wendell Phillips, were read only by fellow mystics and yearners for universal unity. In the United States, they had scant popular appeal. Perhaps only in a cosmopolitan center such as New York would the words of Vasconcelos, expressed in his *La Raza Cós mica* (1925), have had any currency: "the future race," he wrote, "the definitive race, the synthetical race, the integral race, [will] be made up of the genius and the blood of all peoples and, for that reason, more capable of free brotherhood and of a truly universal vision."⁴¹

The vision of Bourne, Vasconcelos, and Teilhard de Chardin would be taken up most eloquently a couple of generations later by a man who was born halfway around the world in a vastly different culture. Bourne would have appreciated Salman Rushdie. Writing in defense of *The Satanic Verses* (1988), which inspired cultural and religious essentialists to offer one million dollars to snuff out his voice, Rushdie explains that it was

written from the very experience of uprooting, disjuncture and metamorphosis . . . that is the migrant condition, and from which, I believe, can be derived a metaphor for all humanity.

Standing at the centre of the novel is a group of characters most of whom are British Muslims, or not particularly religious persons of Muslim background, struggling with just the sort of great problems that have arisen to surround the book, problems of hybridization and ghettoization, of reconciling the old and the new. Those who oppose the novel most vociferously today are of the opinion that intermingling with a different culture will inevitably weaken and ruin their own. I am of the opposite opinion. *The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. *Mélange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world*. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it.

⁴¹ José Vasconcelos, *La Raza Cós mica* (The cosmic race), bilingual edition, trans. Didier Tisdell Jaén (Los Angeles, 1979), 18.

The Satanic Verses is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love-song to our mongrel selves.⁴²

The Satanic Verses has a special vibrancy today in view of how wide the doors of immigration to the United States have swung since 1965. The flow of immigrants now exceeds one million each year with another quarter million illegal immigrants joining them. These newcomers are overwhelmingly Asian and Latino, but many thousands more each year are coming from Africa — on an airborne “middle passage” of a very different kind. Quite remarkably, it was the Cold War that was responsible for prying open the doors of immigration. As Secretary of State Dean Rusk argued in 1965, the United States must end its racist immigration restriction laws of the 1920s because they undermined the nation’s need to offer nonwhite Third World nations an alternative to communism. The immigration laws of 1965 and 1991 have changed the face of this country. Today only one in five Americans is of British descent.

Accompanying this demographic tectonic plate shift has been another great phenomenon of our own time — the breaking down of the social, religious, emotional, and marital barriers that have separated people of different homelands, hues, and histories in the United States. The invisible Berlin Wall, the racial wall, is being dismantled stone by stone.⁴³ The laws prohibiting miscegenation began to fall in western states in the 1950s and 1960s, and in the South after the landmark *Loving v. Virginia* Supreme Court decision in 1967. Today, in Hawaii, 60 percent of babies born each year are of mixed race. In Los Angeles County, the rise in the percentage of Japanese American women who marry out of their ethnic group has risen from one of every ten in the 1950s to two of three today. Similar trends pertain to other Asian American groups. Seventy percent of American Indians tie bonds with mates who are not Indian.⁴⁴ Even the most enduring nightmare of Euroamerica — racial intermarriage between Black and white partners — is no longer extraordinary. Outside the South, more than 10 percent of all African American males today marry non-Black women, and Black-white marriages nationwide have tripled since 1970. Mestizo America is a happening thing. A multiracial baby boom is occurring in America today.⁴⁵

Human emotions — the attraction of people to each other regardless of race and religion and much else — have run ahead of ideology and have often caused identity

⁴² Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981–1991* (London, 1991), 394.

⁴³ For an early campaign against laws prohibiting racial intermarriage, see Louis Ruchames, “Race, Marriage, and Abolition in Massachusetts,” *Journal of Negro History*, 40 (July 1955), 250–73.

⁴⁴ H. H. L. Kitano et al., “Asian-American Interracial Marriage,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 46 (Feb. 1984), 179–90; Mark Nagler, “North American Indians and Intermarriage,” in *Interracial Marriage: Expectations and Realities*, ed. Irving S. Stuart and Lawrence Edwin (New York, 1973), 280–95.

⁴⁵ M. Belinda Tucker and Claudia Mitchell-Kernan, “New Trends in Black American Interracial Marriage: The Social Structural Context,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 52 (Feb. 1990), 209–18; *New York Times*, Dec. 2, 1991, pp. A1, B6; and Paul Ruffins, “Interracial Coalitions,” *Atlantic*, 265 (June 1990), 28–34. Scholarly investigations of racial intermarriage are increasing rapidly. See, for example, Edward Murguía, *Chicano Intermarriage: A Theoretical and Empirical Study* (San Antonio, 1982); Stanley Leberon and Mary C. Waters, *From Many Strands: Ethnic and Racial Groups in Contemporary America* (New York, 1988); Kathy Y. Russel, Midge Wilson, and Robert E. Hall, *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color among African Americans* (New York, 1992); and various essays in Root, ed., *Racially Mixed People in America*.

confusion and anguish. As so often in history, young people have taken the lead. They have founded organizations that have such names as "Interracial, Intercultural Pride" in Berkeley, "Multiracial Americans of Southern California" in Los Angeles, and the "Biracial Family Network" in Chicago. These people resist racial reductionism, a one-dimensional construction of their identity, and insist that identity has many layers, racial and otherwise.⁴⁶

There is nothing new about crossing racial boundaries; what is new is the frequency of border crossings and boundary hoppings and the refusal to bow to the thorn-filled American concept, perhaps unknown outside the United States, that each person has a race but only one.⁴⁷ Racial blending is undermining the master idea that race is an irreducible marker among diverse peoples—an idea in any case that always has been socially constructed and has no scientific validity. (In this century, revivals of purportedly scientifically provable racial categories have surfaced every generation or so. Ideas die hard, especially when they are socially and politically useful.) Twenty-five years ago, it would have been unthinkable for Time-Life to publish a computer-created chart of racial synthesizing; seventy-five years ago, an issue on *The New Face of America* might have put *Time* out of business for promoting racial impurity.⁴⁸

Pride in racial mixing and pride in descent from different races has historical roots, though they are not very deep in this country. In the early twentieth century, biracial couples founded Manasseh clubs in Milwaukee and Chicago, named after the half-Egyptian son of the Old Testament's Joseph. In the 1940s, Los Angeles had its Miscegenation Club to help multiracial couples and their children to "affirm both their heritages."⁴⁹ These are the pioneers of the suppressed and scorned Americans who dared to oppose the relentless bichromatism that entrapped white and Black Americans alike.

Uncovering the shrouded past of mestizo America bears on the ongoing pursuit of *e pluribus unum* in this nation—the search for creating commonality out of diversity. Few would argue in favor of universal intermarriage to achieve *e pluribus unum*; all our grandchildren would be gray, tan, or tawny, and ethnic or racial identity formation would be irrelevant. What we do need in our passionate and sometimes violent arguments about American culture and identity, about courses, canons, and holidays, about entitlements and compensatory programs, is a social and intellectual construction of a mestizo America. This construction can find

⁴⁶ G. Reginald Daniel, "Beyond Black and White: The New Multiracial Consciousness," in *Racially Mixed People in America*, ed. Root, 333–41.

⁴⁷ See Spickard, *Mixed Blood*; Root, ed., *Racially Mixed People in America*; and F. James Davis, *Who Is Black? One Nation's Definition* (University Park, 1991).

⁴⁸ Paul R. Spickard, "The Illogic of American-Racial Categories," in *Racially Mixed People in America*, ed. Root, 12–23. For the latest revival of race as a biological category, see Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York, 1994); for the onslaught of criticism that their argument has received, see Russell Jacoby and Naomi Glauberman, eds., *The Bell Curve Debate: History, Documents, Opinions* (New York, 1995). "Rebirth of a Nation, Computer-style," chart, in *The New Face of America*, special issue of *Time*, 142 (Fall 1993), 66–67.

⁴⁹ Daniel, "Beyond Black and White," 335.

enlightenment and derive sustenance from a hidden chapter of the nation's submerged and tangled mestizo past.

In today's multicultural wars, the tendency has been to define one's identity and therefore one's politics by race or ethnicity. "Multiculturalism" is a slippery term that is used in various and often contradictory ways. When multiculturalism is used simply as multiracialism and as such pretends that culture can be transmitted through genes, it fosters identity politics that absolutize racial differences. Multiculturalism as multiracialism clouds the complicated business of acquiring and transmitting culture. Still worse, when multiculturalism is construed simply as multiracialism, it has led toward a definitional absolutism that has unwittingly defeated egalitarian and humanitarian goals by smothering inequalities of class and fueling interethnic and interracial tensions that give more powerful groups opportunities to manipulate these divisions. Racial absolutism—the enemy of *mestizaje*—insists that racial difference is the alpha and omega of intellectual discourse and politics and, therefore, of social action. This has diverted attention from the intensifying social and economic inequality that surely threatens a democratic polity, and it diverts attention from global ecological problems that threaten all humankind.⁵⁰

Of course, arguments about culture are about power, and hence the kind of multiculturalism that insists on studying self-contained and absolutized racial groups is meant to effect a redistribution of power. All of this began as a legitimate claim to dignity, as a way of shattering the walls of exclusion, domination, and derogation, as an insistence on recognition and representation, and as a strategy for overcoming psychological damage. Ethnic and racial group identity long ago emerged in response to the power of white supremacist America, and at many points in our history ethnic and racial politics have been indispensable in the social reform movements that have brought American society closer to realizing its founding principles. In the past, most historians have supported ethnoracial communities as what David Hollinger calls "vital sites for the formation, articulation, and sustenance of cultural values, social identities, and political power."⁵¹ But many of us have always assumed that cultural particularisms would be vital repositories of political strength and cultural wisdom so long as they did not become brittle and self-contained and so long as they held to a long-term agenda of forging a unified, comprehensive, cosmopolitan, cross-ethnic, and cross-racial community.

Today we need to ask about the costs of the rigidifying of ethnoracial particularisms. The specters of Sarajevo, Sri Lanka, and Somalia fill us with haunting images and dark forebodings. But the unleashing of ancient ethnic and religious hatreds that has quickly followed the toppling of centralized authority around the world

⁵⁰ In these comments and those below, I have been influenced by Philip Gleason, *Speaking of Diversity: Language and Ethnicity in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore, 1992); John Higham, "Multiculturalism and Universalism: A History and Critique," *American Quarterly*, 45 (June 1993), 195–219; and David Hollinger, "How Wide the Circle of the 'We'? American Intellectuals and the Problem of the Ethos since World War II," *American Historical Review*, 98 (April 1993), 317–37.

⁵¹ David Hollinger, "How Wide the Circle of the 'We'?", 322.

is not the main reason for rethinking our own situation. More relevant to our unique historical development is the possibility that we are best served by imagining new ways of transcending America's Achilles' heel of race, now that a certain amount of progress has been achieved in living up to our own credo, especially since the freedom struggles of the 1960s. What we need is a pan-ethnic, pan-racial, antiracist sensibility. Only through hybridity—not only in physical race crossing but in our minds as a shared pride in and identity with hybridity—can our nation break “the stranglehold that racialist hermeneutics has over cultural identity.”⁵²

Historians know how Anglo-chauvinists invented a racial typology and racial categorization to exclude and exploit many of America's peoples; but now we see that historians will need to write about how an ideology has arisen in this era among excluded groups to celebrate racial difference and even to insist on the viciously racist one-drop rule to preserve entitlements. The ethnoracial element in self-identity is not likely to disappear quickly because jobs and dollars, as well as demonstrating discrimination in many forms, depend upon legislative mandates based on racial categories that classify people by skin color and genetic ancestry.⁵³ Yet affiliation by voluntary consent rather than prescribed descent is an unstoppable process that is being carried forward on a mighty wave of personal lives, mate choices, and mixed-race progeny.⁵⁴ When it receives its proper due, the hidden history of mestizo America may help to produce a more cosmopolitan and just America as we approach the end of the century; but this can happen only if this nation will live up to its foundational principles of freedom, equality, and social justice.

The History Children Should Study

Gary B. Nash

The last six months have seen the historian's craft become the subject of a national debate. Perhaps never since the Puritan historians became the first keepers of our written past has so much attention been paid to questions about what historians do, whose history children should study, what our American experience has been, and, indeed, who owns history.

The National History Standards, three volumes of voluntary guidelines for teaching American and world history in elementary and secondary schools, have occasioned vitriolic

⁵² J. Jorge Klor de Alva, “Beyond Black, Brown, or White: Cultural Diversity, Strategic Hybridity, and the Future of Democracy,” paper presented at the Bohem Foundation, New York, N.Y., Feb. 11, 1994 (in Klor de Alva's possession), 23. See also Todd Gitlin, “From Universality to Difference: Notes on the Idea of the Fragmentation of the Left,” *Contention*, 5 (Winter 1993), 15–40; and David Hollinger, “Post-Ethnic America,” *Contention*, 4 (Fall 1992), 79–96.

⁵³ Lawrence Wright, “One Drop of Blood,” *New Yorker*, July 25, 1994, pp. 46–55.

⁵⁴ Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*.

op-ed essays, fiery TV debates, and even a few genuine arguments over the nature of historical interpretation.

Let's assume that we will get beyond drive-by attacks on the history standards. Let's assume that the more than thirty thousand teachers and historians who have read them will convince a lot of people who have read only the *Reader's Digest's* reprint of Lynne V. Cheney's assault on the American history standards, published last fall in the *Wall Street Journal*, that they have been misled. Let's assume that we are a resilient nation with a resilient history profession. What can we learn from and do about the current controversy?

Originally, I was not enamored of the idea of national history standards, although I thought they did provide an opportunity to set before the schools the remarkable historical scholarship of the last half century, which has so transformed our understanding of United States and world history. And since in 1992 it was clear that the National Endowment for the Humanities and the United States Department of Education were going to finance the writing of history standards, it seemed to me that the Organization of American Historians, the American Historical Association, and professional historians in general had better get to the table before the cards were dealt. I eventually became the director of the center that oversaw production of the three volumes of history standards.

The controversy over the standards is part and parcel of a larger, profoundly political, culture war. We saw it played out in 1991 at the National Museum of American Art in the debate over its "West As America" exhibition, which challenged romantic depictions of the West. We saw it in 1992 in the hot controversies over how to celebrate the quincentennial of Columbus's voyage (was he explorer or exploiter?). We saw it in 1994–1995 in the pyrotechnics over the Smithsonian Institution's *Enola Gay* exhibition and the ominous cancellation of it. We see it now in attempts to abolish or cut back funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. All of these controversies involve an assault on curators, artists, and historians who have sought more than a single perspective on the past, have tried to open their work to new voices and different experiences, and have tried to go beyond a happy-face American history and a triumphant celebration of Western civilization. Some critics believe that young Americans should not learn that life is bittersweet and that every society's history is full of paradox, ambiguity, and irresolution.

Let's take a historical perspective on the current struggle. In the 1930s, a now-forgotten former textile-mill worker, Harold Rugg, created a series of United States and world history books, which became widely popular during the Great Depression. Five and a half million copies of the books were used in schools, prized for their emphasis on getting students to think about history rather than learn it by rote and for their attempt to weave social and economic history into the fiercely whiggish history books then in use, which focused narrowly on the march of political democracy in the United States.¹

Then, in the late 1930s, certain businessmen and military organizations determined that Rugg's books—along with textbooks by the eminent historian Carl Becker—were unpatriotic, for example, in pointing out that 10 percent of Americans enjoyed one-third of the national wealth (today, 10 percent command over half of the national wealth). Rugg was also attacked for insisting in his books that pupils "must learn to think critically about modern problems" and for warning against the dangers of "unthinking partisanship."² These attacks nearly drove the books under; in some communities, they were blacklisted and burned.

¹ See Peter F. Carbone Jr., *The Social and Educational Thought of Harold Rugg* (Durham, 1977).

² Carl Wittke, "A Review of Harold Rugg's *Teachers' Guide and Key*," in *The Text Books of Harold Rugg*, ed. Committee on Textbooks, American Committee for Democracy and Intellectual Freedom (New York, 1942), 25.

By 1942, the Committee on Textbooks of the American Committee for Democracy and Intellectual Freedom had published appraisals of Rugg's texts. Historians and social scientists, including Carl Wittke, Robert Lynd, Wesley Mitchell, and George Sabine, were among those on the committee who deplored the attacks. They urged more "honest inquiry" into textbooks and lamented "acrimonious controversy that generates more heat than light."³

We can learn from the Rugg controversy that, while he suffered greatly, the attacks on him could not drive his ideas and new approaches to history underground. We should be heartened that today's controversy over the history standards proves that history matters and that we have an unusual opportunity to reach a public that is interested in history but not well informed about how historians ask new questions, find new sources of information, and construct new interpretations of the past. If it is widely believed, as Rush Limbaugh and Pat Buchanan would have it, that historical revisionism today is simply the work of tenured 1960s radicals, then this is the time to introduce the public to Thucydides and to the generations of historians since who have written history as an uninterrupted negotiation about the character of the past. Plato's words resonate: "Those who hold the power also tell the stories." When Clio's ranks are broadened, new stories are told. That offends and frightens some people.

If a discouraging gap is becoming apparent between historical scholarship and popular conceptions of history, then we should celebrate the closing of another gap—the one between teachers of history in schools and in colleges and universities.

Professional historians took a long walk away from history education in the schools a half century ago, for various reasons. But scores of academic historians now are helping to reunite the two communities of educators. Creating the history standards has been for me an exhilarating team effort of teachers and historians. The attacks on the standards have actually promoted more contact between history teachers in schools and historians in neighboring colleges. Nearly every day I hear of meetings to discuss the controversy and, yes, to look at the standards themselves. I dare say this will provide the basis for further collaborations between these two groups of educators.

The United States Senate can condemn these standards without reading them. The 104th Congress may dismantle the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which includes money for the professional development of history teachers, including summer institutes that bring teachers to universities all over the country. But Congress cannot dishearten those of us who have learned so much from each other by crossing institutional boundaries, and it cannot erase the historical scholarship of our generation any more than it can obliterate historical memory.

³ Wesley Mitchell, "Introduction," *ibid.*