

SIGNS OF
RACE

THE "WHITE OTHER" IN AMERICAN INTERMARRIAGE STORIES, 1945-2008



Lauren S. Cardon



THE “WHITE OTHER” IN AMERICAN
INTERMARRIAGE STORIES, 1945–2008

SIGNS OF RACE

Series Editors: Arthur L. Little, Jr. and Gary Taylor

Writing Race across the Atlantic World: Medieval to Modern

Edited by Philip Beidler and Gary Taylor (January 2005)

Buying Whiteness: Race, Culture, and Identity from Columbus to Hip-Hop

Gary Taylor (January 2005)

English and Ethnicity

Edited by Janina Brutt-Griffler and Catherine Evans Davies

(December 2006)

Women & Others: Perspectives on Race, Gender, and Empire

Edited by Celia R. Daileader, Rhoda E. Johnson, and Amilcar Shabazz

(September 2007)

The Funk Era and Beyond: New Perspectives on Black Popular Culture

Edited by Tony Bolden (August 2008)

Race and Nature from Transcendentalism to the Harlem Renaissance

By Paul Outka (August 2008)

Weyward Macbeth: Intersections of Race and Performance

Edited by Scott L. Newstok and Ayanna Thompson (January 2010)

Richard Wright: New Readings in the 21st Century

Edited by Alice Mikal Craven and William E. Dow (July 2011)

Indography: Writing the "Indian" in Early Modern England

Edited by Jonathan Gil Harris (May 2012)

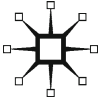
The "White Other" in American Intermarriage Stories, 1945–2008

By Lauren S. Cardon (December 2012)

THE “WHITE OTHER” IN
AMERICAN INTERMARRIAGE
STORIES, 1945–2008

Lauren S. Cardon

palgrave
macmillan



THE "WHITE OTHER" IN AMERICAN INTERMARRIAGE STORIES, 1945–2008
Copyright © Lauren S. Cardon, 2012.

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2012 978-1-137-28716-8

All rights reserved.

First published in 2012 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®
in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world,
this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited,
registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills,
Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies
and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States,
the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-349-44954-5 ISBN 978-1-137-29513-2 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781137295132

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the
Library of Congress.

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: December 2012

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

<i>Series Editors' Preface</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
Introduction	1
1 The Universalist	15
2 The White Witch	43
3 The Shiksa	75
4 The WASP	109
5 The Colonist and the Scout	141
6 The Amerikan	171
Conclusion: The Visible White	205
<i>Notes</i>	223
<i>Works Cited</i>	237
<i>Index</i>	247

This page intentionally left blank

SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

The first thing you see when you enter the permanent exhibits at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute is a pair of drinking fountains. Over one hangs a sign that says "White." Over the other hangs a sign that says "Colored."

To the extent that every social identity is to some degree local, the meanings of race in Birmingham, Alabama, necessarily differ, in some demographic and historical particulars, from the meanings of race in North Dakota and Northern Ireland, New York and New South Wales, Cape Town and Calcutta. But the same questions can be asked everywhere in the English-speaking world.

How do people signal a racial identity?

What does that racial identity signify?

This series examines the complex relationships among race, ethnicity, and culture in the English-speaking world from the early modern period (when the English language first began to move from its home island into the wider world) into the postcolonial present, when English has become the dominant language of an increasingly globalized culture. English is now the medium of a great variety of literatures, spoken and written by many ethnic groups. The racial and ethnic divisions between (and within) such groups are not only reflected in, but also shaped by, the language we share and contest.

Indeed, such conflicts in part determine what counts as "literature" or "culture."

Every volume in the series approaches race from a transracial, interdisciplinary, intercultural perspective. Each volume in the series focuses on one aspect of the cross-cultural performance of race, exploring the ways in which "race" remains stubbornly local, personal, and present.

We no longer hang racial signs over drinking fountains. But the fact that the signs of race have become less obvious does not mean

that they have disappeared, or that we can or do ignore them. It is the purpose of this series to make us more conscious, and more critical, readers of the signs that have separated, and still separate, one group of human beings from another.

GARY TAYLOR

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people have contributed to the writing and publication of this book through their support and encouragement, their suggestions, their guidance, and their hard work. I wish to thank my mentor and friend, Professor Felipe Smith, who has been a part this project from its inception and has given sage advice throughout the different stages of my writing. Professor Joel Dinerstein has also been a valuable advisor during the process of researching, writing, and revising the project, and he has helped me extensively by reading several chapters and offering his suggestions. I could not have completed this manuscript without their help. Professors Molly Anne Rothenberg and Michael Kuczynski have read and critiqued proposals and other materials connected with my book, thereby offering their insight and wisdom as this project has taken shape. I am grateful to Professor Rebecca Mark for giving direction during the early stages of my research, and to Professor Gaurav Desai for his advice during the final stages of the project. I have been very fortunate at Tulane University to have a group of outstanding colleagues, the postdoctoral fellows, as well as Professor T. R. Johnson, the Director of the Freshman Writing Program, all of whom have been a constant source of inspiration and confidence during the writing of this book. I would especially like to thank several members of my writing group, Professors Catherine Gubernatis Dannen, Kate Drabinski, and Ashlie Sponenberg, whose comments and suggestions for revisions were as valuable to me as the support and friendship they offered during the completion of this project.

I am deeply grateful to the librarians, archivists, and administrators at the Howard Tilton Memorial Library at Tulane University, the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building and Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture of the New York Public Library, the Elmer Holmes Bobst Library of New York University, the Robert W. Woodruff Library at Emory University, and the libraries at Columbia University. I would also like to thank Barb Ryan, Executive Secretary

of the Department of English at Tulane, as well as the other members of the department's administrative staff, for helping to make my research trips and other scholarly endeavors connected with this project possible.

During the process of researching this book, I have been privileged to be a part of several different scholarly communities. While working in New York, members of the staff and faculty at the Learning Enhancement Center at Metropolitan College, The New School, Fordham College Lincoln Center, and Yeshiva University were always ready to assist in brainstorming, pointing me in the direction of valuable scholarship, or simply discussing ideas for the project. Specifically, I would like to thank Professors Joe Salvatore, Lisa Bauer, Anne Fernald, Lenny Cassuto, and Fred Sugarman. I am grateful to my colleagues in the American Studies Association and American Literature Association who offered their valuable questions and feedback when I presented portions of the manuscript at their annual conferences. In addition, I want to thank the participants in Tulane's American Studies Works-in-Progress Series, who read and reviewed material that would later become a part of this manuscript.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Robyn Curtis and Brigitte Shull at Palgrave, who first took an interest in my manuscript and were instrumental in taking it to press. Maia Woolner, editorial assistant at Palgrave and Erin Ivy, Senior Production Manager, have provided me with patient and diligent guidance in seeing the manuscript through the various stages of production.

Finally, I want to thank my dear friends and family for their continued love and encouragement, including Megan Holt, Elizabeth Kalos, and Marci Adilman among many others, all of whom have provided the moral support that kept me focused and determined during the writing of this book. My mother, JoAnn, and my stepfather, Ron, always motivate me to succeed in my endeavors through their love and their confidence in my work ethic. My sister, Caroline, mother of my precious twin nephews, has been one of my most valued confidantes as I navigated the final stages of the project, and my brother Aaron, who shares my passion for research and knowledge, continues to inspire me with his own hard work and determination.

INTRODUCTION

“We are not a family that takes defection lightly.” In *Portnoy’s Complaint*, Philip Roth’s protagonist Alex Portnoy describes the explosion of wrath in his family when his cousin, Heshie, declares his intention to marry Alice Dembosky, a *shiksa*. They plead with him, they bring the Rabbi over to try to change his mind, and finally, Heshie’s father physically accosts him. Portnoy describes how he “wrestled him to the floor, and held him there until Heshie had screamed his last obscenity – held him there (so Portnoy legend has it) *fifteen minutes*, until the tears of surrender at last appeared on Heshie’s long dark Hollywood lashes” (58).

Roth wrote *Portnoy’s Complaint* in 1969, at the onset of what we now term the “ethnic revival,” a time of heightened white ethnic solidarity largely inspired by the grassroots organization of the Civil Rights Movement and the minority nationalist movements. Heshie’s fight with his father epitomizes Portnoy’s identity crisis—the inner turmoil driving the novel’s schizophrenic plot. Raised in a Jewish home, educated in a Jewish school, yet encouraged to assimilate into a heterogeneous American dominant culture, how can Portnoy limit his sexual and romantic interests to his own community? Why does the *shiksa* spell doom for the Jewish community in this story? Why, in other texts, is the mixed couple allowed to live “happily ever after”?

When reflecting back on the intermarriage stories of the early twentieth century, we recall a different formula: the self-transformation of Irish immigrant Gerald O’Hara to make himself a suitable mate for Ellen O’Hara in *Gone with the Wind* (1936); the paranoid existence of black characters passing as white to win the hearts of their wealthy Anglo-American partners in *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1912), *Passing* (1929), and *Black No More* (1931); the heroines’ deliberate estrangement from their Jewish communities to secure the love of their Anglo-American Prince Charmings in Anzia Yezierska’s fiction, or similarly, the protagonist’s alienation of a Jewish past in Abraham Cahan’s *The Rise of David Levinsky* to find a beautiful American wife as a badge of successful assimilation.

These earlier texts privilege a white, dominant culture partner in an intermarriage union, casting the ethnic "other" as inferior in appearance and social status. Yet, as *Portnoy's Complaint* demonstrates, in later, post-World War II American literature, the pattern is reversed. The ethnic partner is the member of the exclusive community, rich in culture and history. The white partner has become "other."

These texts and a multitude of twentieth-century popular culture couples—Lucy and Ricky in *I Love Lucy* (1951–1957), Joanna and John in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967), Toula and Ian in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002)—exemplify how a fictionalized intermarriage can illuminate perceptions of both "ethnicity" and "whiteness" at any given historical moment, through both the author's portrayal of each side of the relationship and critical reception to the story. Intermarriages raise questions about American identity: Does "American" mean "white" or a blending of ethnicities? Who better typifies America at any given moment of the twentieth century—the dominant culture, as implied by earlier texts, or the countercultures and ethnoracial groups, as implied by post-World War II texts? How does the *public* nature of the marriage union bring issues of ethnicity and race to the surface that might have remained submerged in a *private*, sexual union?

Intermarriages in fiction do not necessarily reflect contemporary politics or social norms. Instead, they often challenge and subvert existing laws and ideologies. The authors and directors, in many cases, use this trope to unearth the realities of American racial politics, yet they also inevitably reveal their own prejudices. Additionally, intermarriages in fiction expose, by contrasting two cultures, the set of "ethnic markers" that serve to distinguish a particular group at a particular historical moment and within a particular setting.

These narratives are central, therefore, to the negotiations of ethnic and American identity that permeate twentieth-century American literature and film. The juxtaposition of white and white ethnic, dominant culture and immigrant, white and nonwhite, and male and female within a romantic and formally sanctioned context engages the prominent question of how American identity is promoted, established, and renegotiated. Intermarriage stories reflect a changing relationship of whiteness to American identity, as well as the reasons for the changes. They show how specific ethnic groups define whiteness as well as their own criteria for community acceptance. They take into account gender roles in both the dominant culture and various ethnic communities, roles which are often *not* diametrically opposed and which complicate the ethnic female's relationships to her community.

Finally, these stories question what social, historical, and ideological shifts have rewritten the white partner as “other.”

Scholars are perhaps reluctant to explore this concept of the “white other,” as well as the attitudes toward assimilation shared by different ethnic groups. The very concept of a white other threatens to cast members of the dominant culture as victims of discrimination, echoing the rhetoric we so often hear espoused by opponents of social programs like Affirmative Action. In addition, focusing on the parallels among ethnic communities threatens to diminish the distinctions of particular groups, to oversimplify community values, to collapse unique histories into a congealed mass of collective grievances.

Yet the white other is not a victim. *Portnoy’s Complaint’s* Alice Dembosky is beautiful and popular, a Polish baton twirler coveted by the Jewish adolescents at Portnoy’s high school. Heshie’s family and community object to her on the basis of potential offspring, the rupture in ethnic continuity across future generations. *My Big Fat Greek Wedding’s* Waspy Ian Miller, too, is a paragon of kindness and physical attractiveness, yet he is “othered” by Toula’s Greek family. As the outsider of the community, *he* makes *them* question their boundaries, the criteria for acceptance. He is only a victim insofar as they are victims of a collective history of prejudicial thinking: each side participates in a negotiation of ethnic representation.

Focusing on such negotiations in these narratives actually reinforces rather than diminishes the unique qualities of the different ethnic communities I explore. I’m not looking for common cultural characteristics, but rather for common narrative tropes in these works, as well as common fears and attitudes toward outsiders among the various ethnic communities.

I focus on intermarriage and cross-ethnic courtship with the intention of marriage, not merely sexual relations. Most of the texts and films I examine feature a couple’s courtship leading up to an engagement or wedding, though some feature an already-married couple. Unlike nonformalized liaisons, marital relations in literature focus on the communal sanctioning of intermixing between two ethnic groups, as well as the legal sanctioning of “miscegenation.” In addition, while interracial sex, even when acceptable to the community, requires a degree of privacy, intermarriage directly engages public views about race, ethnicity, whiteness, and American identity. Finally, the role of family is central to most of the texts as it pertains to parental consent and concerns about ethnoracial “preservation.”

While nonmarital unions can engage the same issues of ethnic identification and assimilation as those formalized by a legal marriage, I

argue that the authors' appropriation of marriage in these texts forces deliberation of these issues. Over the course of the twentieth century, authors engaging the theme of interfaith, interethnic, or interracial romance typically engage one of two tropes: the passionate affair of two star-crossed lovers from different communities, or the quest for social or legal acceptance when a member of the dominant culture wishes to marry an ethnoracial other. I address this second narrative trope because of the way it unifies the more intimate questions of personal and cultural identity with the more globalized questions of national identity and racial politics.

Looking at intermarriage narratives from different cultural communities serves an additional purpose. While recent scholars like Werner Sollors, Keren McGinity, Renee C. Romano, and Richard Alba have examined how intermarriage exposes ideas about ethnoracial identity and culture within a particular community, I am also interested in how intermarriage exposes what these different communities have in common. I indicate common concerns among recent immigrant communities (Greek, Dominican, and Chinese, for example) and parallel views of whiteness among American Indian and black communities, among other points of intersection. Studying these parallels allows us to question the very nature of ethnoracial solidarity and the purposes it may serve within the contemporary United States.

I have chosen to focus on the period from World War II to the present for several reasons. First, the minority nationalist movements of the 1960s engendered a burst of literature from different nonwhite ethnic groups—while we can find earlier examples of intermarriage stories from these groups, they were not as widely read or as consistent in their treatment of white partners. Second, I am interested in using World War II as a starting point due to the universalist ideology often associated with American reactions to the Holocaust and the Cold War. Finally, I find it useful to frame the larger part of my analysis with the Civil Rights Movement, particularly the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* Supreme Court case, and the 2008 election of Barack Obama, a product of an interracial couple and a figure who represents a kind of resurgent integrationism for the twenty-first century.

With these two dates on either end of the spectrum, both of which appear to promote the image of the United States as a "melting pot," I want to consider the decades between, when separatist ideology usurped ideas about love conquering all and repudiated out-marriage in nonwhite ethnic and Jewish communities. I will look at how and why intermarriage stories went through such a dramatic shift from the first to the second half of the twentieth century, why the white

partner in these stories changed from the epitome of beauty and privilege to the epitome of blandness and cold materialism.

These works from the 1960s to 2008 rewrite many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century intermarriage tropes to favor the interests of ethnic communities and to question the virtues of assimilation into an American dominant culture. Most of these earlier tropes can be sorted into five categories or types: the *amnesiac* narrative, the *invigoration* narrative, the *traitor* narrative, the *tragic other* narrative, and the *resentment* narrative. These tropes may overlap with one another, and in some cases a single text draws from more than one trope, yet the categories serve as a useful point of reference for analyzing intermarriage stories. Each category provides a different vision of America and, by extension, American identity.

The amnesiac narrative implies that the intermarriage will allow the ethnic partner to leave behind past grievances. Best exemplified by the canonical American intermarriage play, Israel Zangwill's *The Melting-Pot* (1908), the narrative features an ethnic partner whose community has suffered persecution at the hands of the white partner's community. In *The Melting-Pot*, before his arrival in America, protagonist David Quixano's family has been slaughtered in a Russian pogrom led by his fiancé's father. The couple's ability to overcome this obstacle and find marital bliss in the end is less indicative of the melting pot ideal David preaches and more about an ability to forget the past, to leave the Old World behind. The amnesiac narrative promotes a cutting of ties with Old World traditions, casts the insular immigrant community in a negative light, and promotes the acceptance of American ideals.

The symbol of the melting pot as explained by David Quixano bears closer resemblance to the invigoration narrative: it implies that people of different backgrounds, when mixed, will produce offspring bearing the best qualities of both groups. Margaret Mitchell's famed novel *Gone with the Wind* (1936) epitomizes the invigoration narrative with its focus on Irish-American heroine Scarlett O'Hara, who vacillates between the determination she associates with her father and the ladylike manners she hopes to inherit from her mother. Despite constant criticism for her "unladylike" strength and intelligence, her bullying, and her obsession with her family's plantation, Tara, Scarlett—unlike any other character in the novel save Rhett Butler—is able to withstand the destruction and economic devastation of the Civil War and help her friends and family survive as well. Mitchell attributes Scarlett's blend of ruthless determination and physical beauty to her mixed parentage—the intermarriage between

Irish immigrant Gerald O'Hara and Southern aristocrat Ellen Robillard—and she repeatedly contrasts this invigorating blend with the Wilkes' sickly dispositions and weakness of spirit, a result of generations of inbreeding. Similarly, Mitchell creates a contrast between the mixed-race (black and American Indian) slave Dilcey, who works tirelessly alongside Scarlett during Reconstruction, with the incompetence of Prissy, a child of two other O'Hara slaves. The invigoration narrative, therefore, casts both intermarriage and miscegenation in a positive light, suggesting they will strengthen American blood and ensure the survival of an American citizenry.

Neither of the above narratives, at least until the mid-twentieth century, typically crossed the color line. Instead, they involved a white ethnic immigrant (Jewish, Italian, Irish) and an Anglo-American citizen, or an African American with another person of color. The traitor narrative, however, engages questions of racial, ethnic, and religious difference. This trope, embodied by James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1912), features a character "passing" as white. In Johnson's novel, the narrator has lived most of his life as a black man and is proud of his heritage, yet sacrifices this identity to secure personal safety, material wealth, and—ultimately—a "lily-white" wife. Despite the material gains, the traitor protagonist feels like a "sell-out," someone who might have lived a more fulfilling life as a member of his or her ethnoracial community. The ex-colored man famously laments at the end of the novel, "...I cannot repress the thought, that, after all, I have chosen the lesser part, that I have sold my birthright for a mess of pottage" (511). The traitor narrative thus favors a pluralistic model¹ of American identity, one which envisions the ideal America as a "glorious mosaic" of different cultures. The narrative also suggests that because discrimination prevents this vision from being realized, minorities must resort to subversion and "passing."

Other passing narratives, though bearing characteristics of the traitor narrative, better epitomize the *tragic other* trope. In this narrative, the white partner falls for the ethnic partner at least in part because of his or her exotic beauty. Despite the passion the partners may feel for one another, ultimately the ethnic partner dies a tragic death. The "tragic mulatto/a"² stories best exemplify this trope, as do the pre-Civil War "lover's leap" Indian plays.³ Nella Larsen's *Passing* fits into the tragic other category, yet Larsen deviates from the traditional tragic mulatta narrative: the heroine, Clare Kendry, is not in love with her doting husband but stays with him for material security, and she is killed by her jealous best friend rather than her enraged

husband or an anonymous white mob. Yet like other narratives in the category, Larsen repeatedly paints Clare as beautiful and exotic, Clare takes a dangerous risk in marrying her husband and hiding her true identity, and, inevitably, she dies the instant he confronts her about the truth. Tragic other stories thus reinforce the boundaries between ethnoracial groups. In most of them, the ethnic partner is “punished” for the transgression across the color line. Meanwhile, the ethnic partner is fetishized: these stories expose the dominant culture’s orientalist fascination with outsiders yet set rigid limits on how far one can pursue such fantasies.

Finally, the resentment narrative features a couple brought together by a common cause and a shared belief that their love can transcend their differences. Anzia Yeziarska, in her 1923 novel *Salome of the Tenements*, features a Jewish immigrant heroine who falls in love with an Anglo-Saxon philanthropist. To win his affection, she cloaks her ethnic- and class-tainted otherness by altering her dress, mannerisms, speech, and living conditions to suit his “doctrine of simplicity” and air of restraint. Yet once the couple is married, they realize how different they are, and how their attitudes are informed by different experiences. They grow resentful toward one another and eventually part ways. These stories, like the amnesiac and invigoration narratives, promote assimilation, yet they caution against an assimilation pursued too rashly. The resentment narrative attempts to strike a balance between assimilation and pluralism, promoting a gradual acculturation to an American mainstream, one which resists leaving behind the ethnic community yet takes on American values of self-improvement, education, and marriage for love.

In the chapters that follow, I refer back to these tropes in an attempt to illustrate how postwar ethnic writers revisit earlier tropes and models of ethnicity. By World War II, white ethnics were no longer categorized separately from whites by the census, and many had gained economic success. By the 1960s, more nonwhite ethnics were also realizing economic success, and many second- and third-generation ethnic Americans—due to heightened assimilation and a steady exodus into the suburbs—had experienced a gradual erosion of ethnic identity. If whiteness no longer signified privilege and citizenship, what did it signify? If America is defined by the American Dream, and ethnic others had access to that dream, how could citizens continue to connect American identity with whiteness? Questions like these tipped the scales of desirability within the intermarriage story, and within the symbolic intermarriage of dominant culture and

ethnic culture. Ethnic writers invoked the traditional intermarriage tropes as they considered how the shift in ethnic consciousness during the mid-twentieth-century delegitimized the dominant culture and advocated ethnic preservation.

Before discussing the breakdown of my approach to these intermarriage stories, I should clarify the terms I will use throughout this book. American studies scholars have debated the usefulness of the terms "ethnicity," "race," and "culture" when examining the social fabric of America. I prefer the term "ethnic" because it encompasses ancestral and cultural classification. The term has been deemed problematic by scholars such as Michael Omi and Howard Winant, who note its appropriation in the 1970s and 1980s to defend "conservative (or 'neoconservative') egalitarianism against what is perceived as the radical assault of 'group rights'" (14). Ethnicity theory has been used to equate the experience of "racial minorities" with that of European immigrants, ignoring the social, economic, and political constructs that have helped to uplift the latter group while excluding and demonizing the former.

In addition to these concerns, "ethnic" could also theoretically apply to anyone, even those Americans descended from Anglo-Saxons. To narrow its application, I use the term "white ethnic" to apply to eastern and southern European immigrants and descendants of those immigrants, once categorized by nationality by the U.S. Census Bureau yet now classified as "White" (eastern Europeans, Italians, Irish, etc.).⁴ I use "nonwhite ethnic" to apply to those still categorized as separate races in the census—those with more visible signifiers of otherness.

For the purposes of this book, I use the terms "white ethnic" and "nonwhite ethnic" unless I am speaking about a specific group. These terms encompass the cultural distinctions of the groups I discuss while allowing for the different experiences of white and nonwhite groups. I prefer the term "nonwhite ethnic" rather than "race" because the latter perpetuates a biological essentialism that has been rendered obsolete for over half a century. At the same time, it is necessary to account for the ways in which the political, economic, and social institutions of the United States have continued to discriminate against certain ethnic groups based on color. Finally, while the word "culture" is useful to indicate values, practices, ceremonies, and other elements of the ethnic experience, using this term as a substitute for "ethnicity" implies that ancestry does not matter in forging an ethnic identity, just as substituting ethnicity for race fails to account for the role color and other physical traits have played in casting some groups

as inferior. As the stories I discuss show, ancestry is crucial in determining ethnic identity.

The terms “white ethnic” and “nonwhite ethnic,” however anachronistic they may be when applied in a pre-1940s context, are appropriate for this discussion because (1) they acknowledge ethnics as groups treated as “other,” with distinct cultural practices, values, and shared histories, and (2) they acknowledge the role skin color has played in dominant culture perceptions of these groups. Generally speaking, intermarriage stories help explicate the fluctuating perception of ethnicity and race in American culture. Looking at a series of intermarriage narratives over the course of the twentieth century involving a Jewish partner, for example, casts Jewish identity as alternately a mere vestige of Old World identity (Israel Zangwill’s *The Melting-Pot*), a nationality (Anzia Yezierska’s *Hungry Hearts and Other Stories*), a religion (Bernard Malamud’s *The Assistant*), and a culture (Philip Roth’s *American Pastoral*). These texts create a discourse of ethnicity and, implicitly, American identity.

I use the term “dominant culture” to indicate how different groups were considered white depending on the time period. White ethnics before World War II did not necessarily represent the dominant culture: they were “othered” before subsequent generations became acculturated into an American mainstream. Even in our current vernacular, we often use the term “WASP” when talking about members of the dominant culture, and in the past, scholars have as well.⁵ This term is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “A member of the American white Protestant middle or upper class descended from early European settlers in the U.S. Freq. *derog.*” This definition indicates the racial, national, religious, and class associations of the term, and it also indicates that the term is considered “derogatory.” I prefer to use “dominant culture” partly for this reason, and partly because white ethnics (often Catholic or Jewish) who assimilate into the white American middle class are often represented as members of the dominant culture.

My discussion in this book begins in 1940, when white ethnics became “White” according to the U.S. Census Bureau. In response to the need to “make democracy look good” in the wake of Nazism and the onset of the Cold War, and perhaps in response to the work of Franz Boas, Ashley Montagu, and other anthropologists who conducted more legitimate studies within the social sciences,⁶ the United States saw a slackening of federally sanctioned racial oppression.

To tie these mid-century sociopolitical shifts into the framing of intermarriage in the popular imagination after World War II,

chapter 1, The Universalist, provides an analysis of post-World War II universalism, which promoted the belief in an inclusive American solidarity that could resist foreign influences while creating the illusion of equality. I discuss writers who cast the dominant culture partner as "the universalist"—the figure who threatens long-respected social and racial castes and disrupts the familiar routines of a family or community. The universalist is also an apologist, someone who must prove himself (or herself) as "color-blind" and indifferent to whatever challenges the couple will face for their ethnorracial difference. Because this chapter traces the reversal of intermarriage narratives from before to after this mid-century era from roughly 1945 to the mid-1960s, I focus on three sociohistorical fluctuations of this era: 1) the restructuring of racial and class-based hierarchies facilitated by the opening of U.S. immigration to war brides and displaced persons (before quotas were lifted in 1965) and the incorporation of white ethnics into the category of "White/Caucasian"; 2) what Sheldon Norman Grebstein terms "the Jewish Movement," encompassing a changing perception of the Jew both sociopolitically and in a literary context; and 3) the Civil Rights Movement, with a focus on the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* Supreme Court case, which led to the enforced repeal of anti-miscegenation laws. My discussion includes the films *Sayonara* (1957) and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967) and Bernard Malamud's novel *The Assistant* (1957).

Late twentieth-century intermarriage stories engage the socio-political changes set into motion by the minority movements, the ethnic revival, and the women's movement. The shift in narratives began after the 1964 implementation of the Civil Rights Act and the 1965 implementation of the Voting Rights Act and the Immigration Reform Bill. The split between the integrationists of the Civil Rights Movement and the increasingly militant Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) engendered a conflict between assimilationists and separatists that we still see today. The black activist movements of the mid-1960s altered the definition of race within the context of American culture, meanwhile inciting cultural awareness in other nonwhite ethnic groups and, in the 1970s, in white ethnic groups. Later twentieth-century black-white intermarriage narratives thus examine the effects of civil rights and black nationalism on interracial love. These stories can also be read as white/white ethnic women escaping into blackness.⁷

Chapter 2, The White Witch, thus includes a discussion of the minority movements that united nonwhite ethnics—the shift from the integrationist postwar era to the separatist 1960s' minority

movements. While nonwhite communities had already developed a group consciousness due to the long history of white exclusionary practices, these communities now sought to redefine their group identities. As nonwhite groups developed a political and cultural group identity, they developed stricter criteria for “belonging.” This chapter examines the repercussions of these movements on black–white relations as well as the relationships between blacks and white ethnics, as I show through Alice Walker’s *Meridian* (1976), Hettie Jones’s memoir *How I Became Hettie Jones* (1990), and Danzy Senna’s *Caucasia* (1998).

The 1960s’ nationalist movements featured in these novels helped engender the ethnic revival of the 1970s. Because of the sudden burst of Jewish-American literature in the postwar era, bolstered by a heightened interest in sociology, Jewish–Gentile intermarriage stories became a staple of American fiction. In [chapter 3](#), *The Shiksa*, I trace the incorporation of the Yiddish word *shiksa* into the American vernacular, but I focus on Philip Roth’s development of this figure into an archetype in two of his novels—*Portnoy’s Complaint* (1969) and *American Pastoral* (1997). I discuss how Roth, as well as Woody Allen in his film *Annie Hall* (1977), establishes the shiksa as both a symbol of success and a threat to survival (of community, identity, and sanity). I also discuss how other writers and authors have built on Roth’s shiksa persona, including popular culture authors such as Laurie Graff, author of *The Shiksa Syndrome*.

Despite the prominence of Jewish–Gentile intermarriage stories during and after the ethnic revival, other white ethnics expressed similar questions about ethnic identity through intermarriage stories. [Chapter 4](#), *The WASP*, analyzes several white/white ethnic intermarriage stories to illustrate post-1960s’ solidarity as manifested in the repression of out-marriage, the excavation and preservation of an ancestral culture, and the immersion of an Anglo partner in a white ethnic family. The characters in these narratives reflect both the longing for a community lost in mid-century assimilation and the need to preserve ethnic traditions after emigration to the United States. All of the works I discuss—Mario Puzo’s *The Godfather* (1969), Helen Barolini’s *Umbertina* (1979), and the film *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002)—extol the virtues of balancing American capital success with ethnic preservation, meanwhile questioning the desirability of a WASP partner and that partner’s motives for pursuing a relationship with the ethnic character.

As these intermarriage stories test the barriers of the ethnic community, they also raise questions about the future, the fate of the

mixed offspring in an increasingly multiracial nation. As American Indian writers became incorporated into the literary canon in the decades after World War II, the fate of the mixed race offspring became a more public question. In [chapter 5](#), *The General and the Scout*, I explore intermarriages as they surface in several Native American works, including Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984), Sherman Alexie's fiction, and several versions of the Pocahontas story including Disney's *Pocahontas* (1995), Terrence Malick's *The New World* (2005), and the oral history *The True Story of Pocahontas: The Other Side of History* (2007) by Dr. Linwood "Little Bear" Custalow and Angela L. Daniel "Silver Star." I discuss how the use of non-linear time in these narratives collapses historical tensions between whites and Indians into the contemporary intermarriage narratives. Rather than focusing solely on the "otherness" of the white partner, however, these texts often highlight the displacement of the "half-breed" offspring—the Indian with one white parent often treated with suspicion by the tribe. Historically, half-breeds, also called "mixed-bloods," are constructed as traitors, people who may live on a reservation yet exhibit dominant culture traits, who have traditionally played the role of the "scout" enabling white colonists to conquer Indian land. In a sense, the mixed-blood character is the living embodiment of the intermarried couple, half polluted by an imperialist race, half a member of a cultural community.

This concept of duality has been explored and developed by Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, and other third-wave feminists. These scholars have popularized the term "Amerika," referring to "American society viewed as racist, fascist, or oppressive, esp. by African-Americans" (*OED*), as a means of articulating the resistance—particularly among women of color—to acculturation into an American mainstream. In [chapter 6](#), *The Amerikan*, I look at post-1965 immigrant narratives by nonwhite authors—Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991), Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), Annie Wang's *Lili* (2002), and Fay Ann Lee's film *Falling for Grace* (2006)—exposing how the white partner surfaces as patriarchal, imperialist, and/or ignorant. I also look at Asian-American intermarriage and courtship stories involving a white male and Asian woman. These stories subvert the "Madame Butterfly" stereotypes of Asian women while calling into question the white partner's motives for pursuing the relationship.

Finally, [chapter 7](#) addresses how contemporary intermarriage stories build on the five earlier tropes yet also establish new tropes: excavation narratives, repatriation narratives, and code-switching narratives.

The excavation narrative implies that a person must understand his roots to connect with his ethnic community and to understand himself; the repatriation narrative ends the text with the ethnic partner's return to the ancestral homeland; and the code-switching narrative takes a set of familiar yet stereotypical subplots in early interracial narratives and reverses them. These recent tropes, rather than racializing the white partner, attribute a set of cultural signifiers to whiteness and, in some cases, even deconstruct the myth of whiteness, revealing a buried ethnic culture in the white partner that carries its own valuable heritage.

THE UNIVERSALIST

If the universalism of the World War II era served to deracinate and to efface the varieties of humankind through the use of too parochial a construction of our common humanity, and if this universalism served further to mask a cultural imperialism by which the NATO powers spread throughout the world their own peculiar standards for truth, justice, and spiritual perfection, then universalism itself, we are told, is too dangerous an ideal.

— David A. Hollinger, “How Wide
the Circle of the ‘We’?”

In Joshua Logan’s 1957 film *Sayonara*, the beautiful Matsu-Bayashi performer Hana-ogi whispers to her American suitor: “I have hated Americans. I have thought they were savages.” It is as if, in the aftermath of World War II, someone held a mirror up to America and passed judgment on her actions and principles. With this mirror, Logan suggests, Americans are forced to realize the fears they share with their enemies, and to question their own tendencies to denigrate those who look different and represent different values.

As the photographs and other documentation of the concentration camps leaked into the United States, as television media made the mushroom cloud of the atomic bomb an image in every American household, and as Cold War paranoia forced Americans to confront their own mortality, Americans recognized the slippery slope of First World power. Documenting the American reaction to the liberation of the concentration camps, Robert Abzug references theologian Reinhold Niebuhr’s assessment of the parallels between American discrimination and Nazi ideology: “The Nazis could not be written off as products of some primitive culture . . . for they had grown up in one of the most advanced societies in Europe, and shared with Americans and the rest of the West racial, religious, and ethnic attitudes that were the precondition for Auschwitz. In many ways they were us,

and that was difficult to face" (18). Americans who sensed these parallels also faced a new fear: that the fall of Nazi Germany and the rise of Communist Russia foreshadowed the eventual collapse of the American empire, its technology, and its capitalist way of life.

How could they change this seemingly inevitable path to failure—or worse yet, annihilation? The government, the news media, the American military all recognized the quandary at hand. For one, the United States had to distance itself from Nazism, which had crushed ethnic, religious, sexual, and political "others" beneath its metaphorical combat boots while those deemed "fit" rose to the top. Americans clung more fervently than ever to a belief in the American Dream, to promises of equal rights and the brotherhood of man. A renewed sense of patriotism helped to spread a national amnesia that worked to erase memories of recent Japanese internment, Franklin Roosevelt's refusal to open America's gates to the Jews before the Holocaust, and the knowledge that the atomic bombs had murdered hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians.

Yet, in addition, America had to distance itself from Communism and to highlight its moral and technological superiority over the U.S.S.R., which served U.S. foreign policy interests abroad as well as economic interests on the domestic front. This distancing quickly solidified into competition: both the United States and the U.S.S.R. were leading international superpowers after World War II. The United States had to make its democratic government appear more humanitarian than a Communist regime to those nations undergoing liberation movements as well as those embroiled in territorial conflicts. Meanwhile, the nation had to reassert its moral, intellectual, and economic superiority within its borders. To reconcile its appeals to nations abroad (particularly those with nonwhite populations—Korea, Africa, Latin America, etc.) with its patriotic appeals at home, the United States framed its competition in ideological terms.

From the onset of World War II to the decades following, therefore, the prototype of the American shifted, and the connotation of America changed to encompass a wider spectrum of individuals, to highlight American moral and technological superiority, and to cast democracy as the best form of government for everyone. The country needed to balance its emphasis on freedom and brotherly love with its new identity as a formidable international superpower.

David A. Hollinger uses the term "universalism" to characterize the shift in American identity politics of this time period. American universalism has alternately been interpreted as American guilt for refusing the entry of Jewish immigrants in the 1930s who would