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Brownness: Mixed Identifications in Minority Immigrant Literature, 1900-1960

by

Swati Rana

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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in

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University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Colleen Lye, Chair

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Professor Rebecca McLennan

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Abstract

Brownness: Mixed Identifications in Minority Immigrant Literature, 1900-1960

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My dissertation challenges our preconceptions of the ethnic literary tradition in the United States. Minority literature is generally read within a framework of resistance that prioritizes anti-hegemonic and anti-racist writings. I focus on a set of recalcitrant texts, written in the first part of the twentieth century, that do not fit neatly within this framework. My chapters trace an arc from Ameen Rihani's *The Book of Khalid* (1911), which personifies a universal citizen who refuses to be either Arab or American, to Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), which dramatizes the appeal of white identification for upwardly mobile Barbadian immigrants. I present the first comparative analysis of Afro-Caribbean, Arab, Filipino, Latino, and South Asian immigrant writings. This archive includes familiar figures such as Claude McKay and William Carlos Williams as well as understudied writers such as Abraham Rihbany and Dalip Singh Saund. I argue that these texts feature a common character: a character who does not want to be exclusively minor, who seeks to identify as widely as possible with majoritarian formations. I propose that this archetype of mixed identification be understood as "brown." Brownness is not a racial category but a literary characterization. It represents the unwieldy paradox of the majority-identified minority subject, a paradox that criticism of ethnic literature has largely ignored. I chart the complex attachments of these brown characters, their Orientalist mediations, asymptotic Americanisms, approximations of whiteness—in sum, their disidentification with minoritization itself. By exploring these vexed desires, I help to explain the perennial attraction of brown characters not only for racialized minorities but also for narratives of U.S. exceptionalism.

For My Family

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Introduction

CHARACTERIZING BROWNNESS

In a speech delivered in Abu Dhabi in January of 2008, then president George W. Bush addressed the people of the Middle East, vowing that the United States would support economic and democratic freedom in the region. It is no surprise that the entente proposed by Bush was not received warmly by an audience subject to the violence and hypocrisies of U.S. neocolonial intervention.¹ What interests me is his closing evocation of Ameen Rihani, an immigrant from Ottoman Syria who lived in the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century:

For most of the world, there's no greater symbol of America than the Statue of Liberty. It was designed by a man who traveled widely in this part of the world—and who had originally envisioned his woman bearing a torch as standing over the Suez Canal. Ultimately, of course, it was erected in New York Harbor, where it has been an inspiration to generations of immigrants. One of these immigrants was a poet-writer named Ameen Rihani. Gazing at her lamp held high, he wondered whether her sister might be erected in the lands of his Arab forefathers. Here is how he put it: “When will you turn your face toward the East, oh Liberty?”

My friends, a future of liberty stands before you. It is your right. It is your dream. And it is your destiny.²

In the context of a war on terror ruled by the polarizing logics of the “clash of civilizations,” Bush deploys the symbology of immigration to close the gap between the United States and the “East.” He emphasizes the Eastern provenance of the Statue of Liberty, which was originally conceived atop the entrance to the Suez Canal.³ The Canal’s mention is appropriate, for its construction (famously lauded by Walt Whitman) literally and symbolically channeled the cultural and geopolitical attentions of Western imperial powers towards a new region that would come to be known as the “Middle East.”⁴

Having immigrated from this region, Rihani is somehow better equipped to bring “the lands of his Arab forefathers” within the reach of the United States. Helped by Rihani’s literary mediations, the Statue of Liberty threatens to leave her customary post at the gateway to the nation of immigrants and illuminate the entire Arab world. In effect, the Statue of Liberty becomes the emblem and the Arab immigrant the herald of U.S. imperial gains.

Bush’s appropriation of Rihani prompts the study of Rihani’s work on its own terms. For Rihani is part of a generation of early twentieth-century immigrant writers who are difficult to incorporate into the field of ethnic literature. From the perspective of ethnic studies, formed in the crucible of the struggle for civil rights, it is difficult to know what to do with literature that is not principally anti-hegemonic and anti-racist. Writings that do not fulfill these imperatives have been largely ignored. My research is motivated by an interest in texts that thwart our categorical choices. What do we make of authors whose identifications are muddled and confusing? How should we read texts that are not resistant but recalcitrant, that reside outside the paradigms we develop for studying ethnic literature, that challenge our own investments in why we read literature, frustrating our desire

to find a site of illumination in the literary? What should we do with characters that are treacherous or compromised, characters that seem to constitute the rearguard of ethnic literature?

I pursue these questions in my dissertation, which focuses on the period from 1900 to 1960 and on writings by Afro-Caribbean, Arab, Filipino, Latino, and South Asian immigrants. This is a challenging archive in three senses. First, it includes recalcitrant texts by well-known writers that are often difficult to assimilate to their oeuvre, such as *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959) by Paule Marshall, *Yes, Mrs. Williams* (1959) by William Carlos Williams, or *Gingertown* (1932) by Claude McKay.

Second, it encompasses writers from an understudied generation, often considered to be defunct, such as Rihani, Abraham Rihbany, Dhan Gopal Mukerji, Dalip Singh Saund, and José Antonio Villarreal. Some of these writers are only starting to come into scholarly consciousness. There are exciting firsts here: whether the first Arab American autobiography or the autobiography of the first Asian American Member of Congress. But these decades are identified with restrictionism and assimilative pressures, when radical critiques of the American dream on the part of immigrant writers had not yet erupted into critical consciousness. The Orientalist mediations of these writers, their unabashed Americanism, as well as their attachments to whiteness are potentially embarrassing from the vantage of our post-civil rights moment.

Third, this archive comprises the literature of groups that are difficult to assimilate to prevailing ethnoracial and literary categories insofar as they are not black, white, or yellow. Contemporary ethnoracial classifications had not yet found their full realization in this period. Some of these immigrants were identified as brown, as in the case of immigrants from British India, who were described by California nativists as a “brown horde,” or Filipino and Latino colonial subjects who were incorporated as “little brown brothers” into the vexed family of U.S. empire.⁵ More often, they strained the enterprise of racial categorization altogether. “Others didn’t know whether to call us white, brown, or yellow,” one Syrian immigrant recalled of his own turn of the century experience.⁶ In the words of one landlord faced with an Indian immigrant in 1924, “we are shocked to see a black white man.”⁷ There is a gap in these years, partly in the historiography of immigration but also in the study of non-European ethnic literature, which has tended to focus on the post-1965 period characterized by major shifts in immigration patterns and policies.⁸ We have a very limited sense during the first half of the twentieth century of how non-European immigrants author their own identity, rather than functioning as objects of social and juridical discourses.

Because of the conceptual and ideological difficulties they present, these writers and texts have largely been neglected by critics of ethnic literature. How should we approach this neglected archive? On the one hand, we face the important task of constructing a fuller ethnic literary history, by combing primary sources and resurrecting relatively unknown writers such as Rihani, Rihbany, Mukerji, and Saund, who were by no means insignificant in their own time. But if inclusion were sufficient, it would suffice to read these figures into the developing canons of Arab American and South Asian American literature, or, in the case of Marshall, McKay, José Garcia Villa, Villarreal, and Williams, to explore their uneasy relation to African American, Filipino American, Chicano, and Boricuan diasporic literature, respectively. These texts are not only significant in terms of the literary history of a given ethnoracial group, but they speak to one another.

The challenge is to develop a conceptual framework for reading ethnic literature in the first half of the twentieth century without retroactively canalizing this literature into a given ethnoracial formation. I take up this challenge in my work, proposing that we understand this neglected archive

through the lens of brownness, and brown character in particular. In addition to reading *Brown Girl, Brownstones* in the context of African American or Afro-Caribbean literature, or black transnationalism, I argue that we must read *Brown Girl, Brownstones* alongside Villarreal's *Pocho* (1959) and Williams's *Yes, Mrs. Williams*. As my readings demonstrate, these texts offer a shared imaginative vision that transforms our understanding of minoritarian desire.

In recent decades, critics have started to use the term “brown” to organize their work. Taking his cues from W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Vijay Prashad's *The Karma of Brown Folk* (2001) explores how South Asian Americans complicate “the narrative Du Bois offered a century ago,” identifying the former as “brown” without explicitly theorizing this identification.⁹ José Muñoz comes to brownness while taking Latinidad as his starting point. “Brownness is not white, and it is not black either, yet it does not simply sit midway between them,” Muñoz writes, proposing that “brown feeling” be understood as an “ethics of the self that is utilized and deployed by people of color and other minoritarian subjects who don't feel quite right within the protocols of normative affect and comportment.”¹⁰ Other scholars apply the term “brown” primarily to Chicano and Latino subjects. For instance, Curtis Márez reads Chicano working class cultural production in terms of “brown style,” and José Saldívar attributes “a brown sensibility” to Américo Paredes.¹¹ Richard T. Rodríguez reviews three books on “brown queer existence” that address literary and cultural production by Chicanos and Latinos, Frederick Luis Aldama's *Brown on Brown* (2005) being among them.¹² Aldama and Rodríguez employ the term “brown” self-evidently, although Rodríguez briefly relies on Márez in order to establish the term's function as “an expansive signifier,” at once suggestive of “the hazy in-between space of Chicano culture” or of an identification like “Latino” that “exceeds national demarcation.”¹³ In a more capacious usage of the term, Allan Punzalan Isaac draws a suggestive map of the “brown borders” of the United States, explicitly racializing Filipinos and Puerto Ricans as “brown” while intimating that Latinos, Asian Americans, as well as Southern and Eastern European immigrants are also included within the purview of this term.¹⁴

This work suggests the emergence of what I would call “brownness studies” as a critical discourse in its own right. But how is it that Chicanos, Filipinos, Latinos, Puerto Ricans, and South Asians, not to mention minority subjects more broadly, come to be identified as “brown”? That these critics take the brownness of their subjects as axiomatic in one way or another presents an exciting opportunity for theorization.

In a sense, these critics are trying to account for groups that do not fit within a binary model of black and white racialization, not to mention its triangulation with Asian America. For instance, Claire Jean Kim charts the triangulation of race along two axes, inferior-superior and foreigner-insider. She argues that “Asian Americans have been racially triangulated vis-à-vis Blacks and Whites” by way of two processes: “relative valorization” whereby Asian Americans are valorized by “Whites” as culturally or racially superior to “Blacks,” and “civic ostracism” whereby Asian Americans are denigrated by “Whites” as foreign and unassimilable in comparison to “Blacks.”¹⁵ But it is possible that the “civic ostracism” or “relative valorization” of brown subjects can be said to proceed on different grounds: whether because they have a flexibility around racialization that “yellow” subjects imperiled by a longstanding genealogy of nativist violence and exclusion might not have, or because they might be subject to different forms of inferiority, arising in part from their colonial status.

This overlapping yet distinct relation is exemplified by the Supreme Court decisions in *Takao Ozawa v. United States* (1922) and *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923), both of which confirmed that both Japanese and “Hindu” immigrants were not white and therefore ineligible to

naturalize. And yet the arguments made by the claimants were quite different: whereas Ozawa's claim to whiteness was epidermal and cultural (he argued that his skin color made him white, "whiter than the average Italian, Spaniard or Portuguese," and that he was a "true American," attesting to his successful assimilation), Thind's claim rested upon a putative "Caucasian" kinship (that was unavailable to a member of the "Mongolic or Yellow Division" at the time).¹⁶ In other words, the brown immigrant could claim a blood relation to the white family that the "yellow" immigrant could not. A suggestively titled volume of essays, *A Part, Yet Apart* (1998), underscores this vexed relationship. As Rajiv Shankar points out in the foreword to this anthology, "under the *genus* Asian American we may have the *species* of East/Southeast Asian American and South Asian American, the former more numerous and more deeply etched into the prevailing American epic, but the latter fast unfolding its own unique drama to claim an equally special place in the standard American repertoire."¹⁷ Similarly Isaac notes that Filipinos occupied an "anomalous position *within* the U.S. domestic sphere" as "*noncitizen nonaliens*," who could identify as "American" and could travel between colony to metropole; while colonial subjects such as Puerto Ricans, Filipinos, Chamorros, and Samoans are not citizens, they are not "exactly alien."¹⁸

Brownness requires that new configurations be charted within and without the field of racial triangulation. It is not only outside of, or abjected from, but also inside of, cathected to—not only different but also the same. Brownness is not only "none of the above" but it is also "all of the above"—both/and in addition to neither/nor in its relationship to blackness and whiteness. This is a movement that casts the very enterprise of triangulation into question. Rather than moving from two relatively stable categories toward a third, it is the categorical premise itself that is destabilized. It might help to understand brownness as analogous to "queerness" in this respect. Just as queerness transcends gender identifications while encompassing them, brownness transcends ethnoracial identifications while encompassing them. It is a non-category in this sense, drawing attention to the problem of categorization itself.

Hiram Perez's brief but suggestive exploration of brownness is useful here. Reading the absent presence of brownness at the 2003 Gay Shame conference at the University of Michigan, Perez argues that "brown bodies were allowed 'access'—if it can be called that—only as spectacle for the consumption of gay cosmopolitanism."¹⁹ The "brown bodies" in this account are those of queer people of color (himself serving the sole representative function) and of the projection of a host of other desires in the course of the conference, converging around the figure of a so-called "Latin" model named Kiko, images of whom were uncritically screened in the course of one presentation. "His brownness functions in itself as a kind of traveling contact zone," Perez argues, pointing out that the gay male cosmopolite "gets to have his brown body and eat it, too."²⁰

In this context, Perez offers a set of useful parameters for thinking about brownness more theoretically:

What color is brown? In regard to race classification, brown is no more a natural color than black or white or yellow or red; brown is a verb. "Brown" designates a kind of constitutive ambiguity within U.S. racial formations—an identity that both complicates and preserves the binary opposition white/other. I use the category here to mark a position of essential itinerancy relative to naturalized, positivist classes such as white, black, Asian. Itself provisional as an identity category (a waiting station of sorts between white and black, or white and Asian, for example), I make use of "brown" provisionally myself—and tactically—

to demystify how bodies are situated outside white/black or white/Asian binaries to consolidate cosmopolitan, first world identities. As a repository for the disowned, projected desires of a cosmopolitan subject, it is alternately (or simultaneously) primitive, exotic, savage, pansexual, and abject. It is black and not black, Asian and not Asian, white and not white. In an age of weak multiculturalism, it is what it needs to be to maintain existing racial hierarchies, a race discourse morally divested from politics and social redistribution. That ambiguity designated here as “brown” is opportunistically and systematically deployed at times of crisis—as instanced by the intensified race profiling authorized by 9/11.²¹

Perez begins by dispensing with epidermal identification. Brownness is ambiguous, itinerant, and provisional, characterized by alternation. It is a screen for all manner of projections. We must wait at the station of brownness for its uses to emerge. A stable definition is unlikely. The term has a chameleonic flexibility: “it is what it needs to be.” And yet Perez is able to tackle its deployments with marvelous precision, whether in the case of academic gay cosmopolitanism’s imbalances of power or in a post-9/11 era in which “brown” visibility is targeted and criminalized.

Stepping back from this critical overview, it is clear that brownness is not a formal racial category. By and large, “brown” people are unintelligible in the historical record as such. They are not found in official racial discourses, in the reified terms of race as identity or stable marker. In this sense, brownness names the sliding of the signifier of race. If we understand race as a social construction, rather than natural fact or mere illusion, brownness is the site that calls for this understanding, that demands it be put into practice.²² We find in brownness a reprieve from exhausted racial categories. If “black” and “white” suggest racial definition, “brown” suggests amorphous possibility. It represents two broad tendencies: combinative (all of the above), a mixture or amalgamation of “black” and “white” terms; and alternative (none of the above), to the extent that it can be identified as “black” or “white” but is coextensive with neither. Frantz Fanon’s suggestive figuration of “black skins, white masks” might be said to denote brownness as both combination and alternation.²³ Jean Toomer’s coinage of the “blue man” is also exemplary, informed by his claim to membership in “a new race in America”—“neither white nor black nor in-between.”²⁴

If anything, brownness is many things. It is a concept unsuited to closed definition. Provisionally, then, I propose we understand brownness as a “problem-space” remaindered by the dialectical overdetermination of blackness and whiteness. I take this term from David Scott, who characterizes a “problem-space” as “a discursive context, a context of language,” “a cognitively intelligible arrangement of concepts, ideas, images, meanings, and so on,” that is additionally “a context of argument and, therefore, one of *intervention*”; what distinguishes a given problem-space according to Scott is that it is “an ensemble of questions and answers around which a horizon of identifiable stakes (conceptual as well as ideological-political stakes) hangs. That is to say, what defines this discursive context are not only the particular problems that get posed as problems as such (the problem of ‘race,’ say), but the particular questions that seem worth asking and the kinds of answers that seem worth having.”²⁵

Although Scott is concerned primarily with the problem-space of postcolonial history and historiography, I find his concept useful for honing my own focus. Following Scott, I think of brownness as a conceptual problem-space, a crucible within which certain kinds of questions get to be raised. But what is the most salient intervention into this problem-space? To my mind, the “identifiable stakes” of brownness are precisely, as Scott suggests, “conceptual as well as ideological-

political.” Brownness has been read predominantly in terms of a recuperative desire. Prashad, for instance, “asks us brown folk how we can live with ourselves as we are pledged and sometimes, in an act of bad faith, pledge ourselves, as a weapon against black folk,” a question to which his second book provides an answer by reconstructing the history of Afro-Asian solidarities.²⁶ For Saldívar, Paredes’s “brown sensibility” is that of an “(anti)(post)-colonial intellectual bringing before the reader’s eyes the upheaval of an anti-imperialist imagination in the borderlands.”²⁷ Márez finds in the “brown style” of the Chicano working class “a critical discourse that simultaneously counters Anglo repressions, opposes the white supremacist assumptions of highbrow taste, and affirms the qualities of Chicano difference.”²⁸ I read their work in the genealogy of “brown power,” emerging out of the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. They focus on the progressive and revolutionary potential of brownness as allied with blackness, excavating literary and historical opposition to state-sanctioned oppression of minorities in the United States and beyond. This is urgent political work, particularly in the United States where assimilation of immigrants takes place “On the Backs of Blacks,” in Toni Morrison’s trenchant phrasing.²⁹

But how should we understand brown styles and sensibilities that are not in fact oppositional? What do we do with the “bad” literary forms that brownness takes? We need to develop a post-post-resistance vocabulary that begins from the now familiar insight that hybridity does not necessarily produce resistance and asks what other kinds of identifications hybridity does indeed produce.

In his seminal contribution to postcolonial theory, Homi Bhabha advanced the idea of hybridity, emphasizing cultural difference as opposed to cultural diversity. “The difference of cultures cannot be something that can be accommodated within a universalist framework,” Bhabha points out in a 1990 interview, developing the idea of cultural hybridity out of a sense of “*incommensurability*” between different cultures and cultural practices.³⁰ In his view, hybridity leads us to a “third space,” which “displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom,” a space in which we find “something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation.”³¹ He goes on to develop this concept, linking the “third space” to a fundamental “ambivalence in the act of interpretation” which arises from the fact that a cultural text is “crossed by the *différance* of writing.”³² Building on concepts such as Wilson Harris’s “void” and Fanon’s “occult instability,” Bhabha avows that this “third space” has “a colonial or postcolonial provenance” while at the same time inscribing this Derridean deferral into the Western nation itself, “conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of a culture’s *hybridity*.”³³

This paradigm came to American studies, and Asian American studies in particular, with the seminal work of Lisa Lowe who asks that we “explore the hybridities concealed beneath the desire of identity,” that we acknowledge that this desire “depends upon the existence of a fundamental horizon of differences,” emphasizing “heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity in the characterization of Asian American culture.”³⁴ She locates within Asian American subalternity a “counterhegemony” that is “both ethnically specific, yet simultaneously uneven and unclosed,” allowing for a variety of different political affiliations.³⁵ Although “Asia/America resides *in transit*, as a point of reference on the horizon that is part of *both* a ‘minority’ identity and a ‘majority’ identity,” in David Palumbo-Liu’s words, the critical imperative (paralleled in brownness studies) is to divest this minoritarian

formation from majoritarian identification.³⁶ “Yellow is emphatically neither white nor black,” Gary Okihiro allows, “but insofar as Asians and Africans share a subordinate position to the master class, yellow is a shade of black, and black, a shade of yellow.”³⁷ This is one effect of Lowe’s transposition of the hybridity concept to Asian American studies. In Colleen Lye’s words, “the recognition of Asian American ‘heterogeneity’ has even *required* the accompanying conception of Asian American ‘hybridity,’ or the notion of minority culture as a counterhegemonic formation.”³⁸

But critics have shown that hybridity is not necessarily counterhegemonic. Sunaina Maira’s interviews with second-generation Indian immigrant youth demonstrate this, building upon Bhabha’s suggestion that “new structures of authority” can in fact develop in hybrid sites. In Maira’s words, the “trouble with this processual, postmodernist view of identity is that, when observed in cultural practice, the identities postulated by these subjects on the hyphen often reveal yearnings to simply ‘be’ something or someone, fixed, rooted, and clearly recognized.”³⁹ Similarly, Pheng Cheah calls for attention to “miredness,” the recognition of “the national-in-the-cosmopolitical” that hybridity theory tends to elide.⁴⁰ Cheah also helps us to see that transnational migrancy is not identical to postcoloniality, that it might be “asking too much from these hybrid cosmopolitanisms to expect them to respond to the precarious necessity of postcolonial nationalism in neocolonial globalization.”⁴¹ Arif Dirlik points up the limitations of the concept for Asian and Asian American studies, arguing for “the qualification of diasporic with place consciousness,” advancing “rootedness as a metaphor” that “points inevitably to concrete places that belie easy assumptions about the homogeneity of national soil or culture.”⁴² This is an argument that Sau-ling Wong supports in contravention of Lowe’s work, opposing the denationalization of Asian American studies and the promotion of an “exilic sensibility.”⁴³ As David Gutiérrez and Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo note, nationalism continues to structure immigrant identification in the United States insofar as immigrants make claims “on the nation, not on transnational, supranational, or global institutions.”⁴⁴

There is a sense that hybridity theory proliferates differences and evacuates all sense of distinction, tendencies which are tied to the postmodern, poststructuralist, and deconstructive provenance of the term. It is no surprise that efforts have been made to situate hybridity, to moor the concept to persistent countervailing forces, such as nationalism, or belonging, or the palliatives of identity. Cheah’s formulation of the “national-in-the-cosmopolitical” is exemplary in this regard. Susan Koshy’s response to Wong asks that we grow comfortable with this construct, critiquing the false assumption of an opposition between the national and transnational, the domestic and diasporic.⁴⁵ And Patricia Chu suggests that we understand “Asian American subjectivities as a dialectic between two mutually constitutive aspects of ethnicity, the Asian and the American.”⁴⁶ They all reinvigorate dialectical “contradiction” in one way or another, a move that Dirlik also champions, arguing that “it allows for the same open-endedness as hybridity while remaining attentive to questions of historicity and concreteness.”⁴⁷ Steve Yao’s efforts to taxonomize hybridity can be similarly understood, for he proposes that we “*differentiate* between writers and the range of compositional strategies they employ,” elucidating a variety of hybrid techniques (from “mimicry” to “mutation”).⁴⁸

These critics attempt to restore a sense of dialecticism to hybridity, to differentiate and structure the unwieldy concept. Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank’s intervention into current theoretical practices is instructive here. For they describe the tendency to theorize in “digital (on/off)” rather than “analog (graduated and/or multiply differentiated)” modes, pointing out that the

former involves its own kind of essentialism: “Essence is displaced, under these routines, from the analogic possibility of *finitely multiple qualitative differences*, to some prior place where an *undifferentiated* stream of originary matter or energy is being turned (infinitely) *on* or *off*.”⁴⁹ Bhabha is also useful here, insofar as he highlights the “incommensurability” of the hybrid space. As he puts it, responding to his perception of the 1990s public sphere, “we really do need the notion of a politics which is based on unequal, uneven, multiple, and *potentially antagonistic*, political identities.”⁵⁰

In effect, we need more capacious ways of understand ideological ambivalence. As Lye suggests, we must complicate the wholesale attribution of counterhegemonic resistance to Asian American cultural production. Jinqi Ling offers one approach to this problem, theorizing “emergent Asian American literature” as a “negotiated process” that “necessarily involves political contestations, rhetorical innovations, articulations of extreme positions, acceptance of undecidable consequences, and modification of prior stances.”⁵¹ Similarly, Viet Nguyen asks that we move beyond the dichotomy of “resistance” and “accommodation,” given that “Asian American intellectuals as a whole have tended to see Asian America as a place of resistance and have not been capable of articulating a theoretical framework that can address Asian America’s ideological diversity and contradictions.”⁵² In a related vein, Raúl Coronado takes up the “pre-Movimiento Chicana/o literary archive” insofar as it poses a problem for Chicano and Latino literary history because it does not offer “resistance to an emergent, colonizing, Anglo-American hegemony” despite expectations by critics to the contrary; he argues that the “emphasis on resistance, so predominant though conceptually underdeveloped in Chicana/o cultural studies, is not a productive lens through which to understand the nineteenth century or, for that matter, the complexity of human creative expression.”⁵³ María Carla Sánchez grapples with “the Color of Literary History” in her suggestively titled essay, studying the work of “early Mexican American writers who claim a ‘pure’ Spanish ancestry, one devoid of indigenous, African, or Jewish presences, and understood implicitly within their own communities as ‘white,’” work that raises questions not only about “the utility of resistance theory” but also the “notion of a genealogy of Mexican American literature as a whole.”⁵⁴ Muñoz’s concept of “disidentification” is indispensable here, for it names “the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian sphere,” knowing full well “that counterdiscourses, like discourse, can always fluctuate for different ideological ends.”⁵⁵

Building on this work, I propose to understand how immigrants might well function as antagonists and protagonists of American exceptionalism. I do not recuperate brownness as an antiracist or antihegemonic formation. Rather, I emphasize the “essential itinerancy” of this category, following Perez, exploring how brownness “complicates and preserves the binary opposition white/other.” My work proposes to treat the contradictions of brownness more fully by focusing on brownness insofar as it borders on whiteness, or “Near-white” desire as McKay memorably puts it in a short story of that title. I excavate the hidden proximity of brownness not only to whiteness but to other forms of majoritarian desire. The hyphen, in McKay’s story, becomes the sign of hegemonic identification—a privilege enshrined in law from the 1790 Naturalization Act onwards, which limited citizenship and all the rights thereof to “free white persons.”⁵⁶ The American dream holds out this deferred promise: the notion that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are available to all who seek them. Insofar as brown characters pursue this dream, they can be united under the sign of treachery. The charge of Pochismo is writ large against the works I consider, in a comparison that traverses Rihbany’s born-again Americanism in *A Far Journey* (1914) and Villarreal’s much-maligned

protagonist, Richard Rubio, of the aptly titled *Pocho*. I attend to these traitorous characterizations, developing a hermeneutic for reading desires that we are not quite sure how to approach from the vantage of progressive literary scholarship. Put differently, I attend to pocho power rather than brown power, exploring the hold of majoritarian desire upon minority writers in the first part of the twentieth century.

The remaindered formation occupied by these writers produces what I call “brown characters” in their work. Although such brown characters emerge out of the particular situation of immigrants who are neither black nor white, they are not necessarily racialized. They occupy a conceptual space remaindered from the study of ethnic literature in the United States. They do not want to be exclusively minor but seek to identify as widely as possible with any and all majorities. Neither oppositional nor reactionary, they are “brown” insofar as they represent mixed identification: the unwieldy paradox of the majority-identified minority subject. My chapters trace an arc from Rihani’s *The Book of Khalid* (1911), which characterizes a Syrian immigrant as the heroic Superman of America, who desires to unite the world under the emblem of American exceptionalism, to Marshall’s *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, which dramatizes the appeal of white identification for upwardly mobile Barbadian immigrants, crafting a brown anti-hero in the figure of Selina, who must die a symbolic death in order to open up the space of black transnationalism. These readings are situated in the context of domestic and transnational discourses of race, transoceanic and hemispheric geographies, and the global politics of colonialism and anticolonialism. I chart the complex attachments of brown characters, their vexed mediations, asymptotic Americanisms, approximations of whiteness—in sum, their disidentification with minoritization itself.

The first half of the dissertation explores an East-West topography of immigration. Chapter One, “Prophets of the Holy Land,” reads the imaginative journey of two immigrants from Ottoman Syria to their adoptive land. I begin with Rihbany’s spiritual autobiography, *A Far Journey*, which presents his immigration as an allegory of pilgrim’s progress. I show how Rihbany carefully interweaves Protestantism and Americanism in a series of conversions that climax in his claim to the lineage of the pilgrim forefathers. In Rihani’s loosely autobiographical novel, *The Book of Khalid*, the protagonist makes a comparable claim. Khalid reconceives himself as the “Superman of America,” fashioned from a combination of romanticist and transcendentalist discourse. He is the consummate brown hero, who seeks to unify old world and new, Syria and the United States. Rihani both generates and undermines these aspirations, building a “sub-transcendental” critique of Khalid into the very form of his novel. But his epistolary volume, *Letters to Uncle Sam* (written from 1917 to 1919), represents a continuation of Khalid’s desire, appealing to the United States to support the cause of Arab nationalism abroad.

Chapter Two, “Columbus’s Mistake,” explores the similarly troubled rapprochement of “East” and “West” in the writings of two immigrants from British India. I begin with Mukerji’s autobiography, *Caste and Outcast* (1923), which strains to find a providential truth in Columbus’s mistaken discovery. Coming in the same year as a Supreme Court decision denying “Hindu” claims to whiteness and therefore to naturalization, this effort is inassimilable to the body of Mukerji’s autobiography. But it nonetheless finds a place in the epilogue, which prophesies a future wherein India and America are conjoined at the very extremity of their contrast. Saund’s autobiography, *Congressman from India* (1960), proves to be a noteworthy successor to this vision, staging his mercurial rise from immigrant farmer to member of Congress. I show how Saund crafts a brown character who is both figuratively and literally an majoritarian representative, all the more so because

he is a postcolonial British subject and consequently heir to the revolutionary lineage of the founding fathers.

The second half of the dissertation explores a North-South topography of immigration. Chapter Three, "Speaking United States," shifts from transoceanic to hemispheric axes of immigration, focusing on three texts that develop in relation to American empire. I begin with Williams's *Yes, Mrs. Williams* (1959), which offers a composite figuration of brown character. I show how Williams reinscribes the violence of Puerto Rican colonization, incorporating his mother's biography into his own. Then, I analyze a cycle of short stories from Villa's *Footnote to Youth* (1933) in which the protagonist seeks to efface his Filipino colonial status. Dogged by the stigma of racialization, he imagines a "white" rebirth into a metaphysical realm that does not admit of the strictures of biography. Finally, I read Villarreal's bildungsroman, *Pocho* (1959), which crafts a similar figure in the paradigmatically brown protagonist. Although Richard is generally viewed as a staunch individualist, I argue that he personifies the predicament of the universalist minority subject whose overbroad identifications are exemplified by the queering of desire within the text.

Chapter Four, "Brown Skin Blues," examines mixed identifications in the works of two Afro-Caribbean immigrant writers. I focus on the female "near-white" characters of McKay's *Gingertown*, whose asymptotic desires for whiteness end in disfigurement and rejection. "Gingertown," I argue, names a hitherto unexplored region of McKay's canon, the detritus of McKay's transnational vision of blackness. I then address the proliferation of "brown" denominations in *Home to Harlem* (1928), arguing that McKay seeks to dispel the specter of the "near-white" women of *Gingertown*, invoking the possibility of mixed racialization without mixed identification. I close with a reading of Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, which presents a formidable brown character in Silla, who tries to follow in the footsteps of white immigrants before her. For her daughter, Selina, the staircase of upward mobility leads nowhere. I argue that Selina is a brown anti-hero: she refuses to be conscripted into the national narrative of the American dream, instead seeking her allegiances beyond the borders of the United States.

My work builds upon Muñoz's theory of disidentification, which opens up a productive space between identification and counteridentification (which roughly map onto assimilation and anti-assimilation). For Muñoz, disidentification names a set of "survival strategies" that are not always adequate to survival: at times more or less direct negotiations with majoritarian power are warranted. Nonetheless, Muñoz emphasizes that disidentification is not "an apolitical middle ground" between say Booker T. Washington or Du Bois, or Richard Rodriguez and his detractors (both prominent controversies around assimilationism and anti-assimilationism that Muñoz cites); its "political agenda is clearly indebted to antiassimilationist thought."⁵⁷

These are precisely the controversies that inspire my own research, although in a somewhat different vein. The positions of Washington and Rodriguez cannot be adequately described as assimilative. To my mind, they represent mixed identification: the aporia of the majority-identified minority subject. It is futile to recuperate this thinking, or render it "antiassimilationist" given its thorough anti-antiassimilationism. Rodriguez, for instance, is well aware of his vexed position as "the brown Uncle Tom," as he puts it in the prologue to *Hunger for Memory* (1982).⁵⁸ My goal is not to demystify his position, as critics have already done. But I do hope to create space for mixed identification within the study of minority literature, to theorize brown characters so that we can explore their deployment within the unfolding drama of American exceptionalism. Although I focus on Afro-Caribbean, Arab, Filipino, Latino, and South Asian immigrant writers in the first part of the

twentieth century, my goal is ultimately to offer a literary hermeneutic for reading the minority conservatism of figures like Washington and Rodriguez.

How can we begin to account for the mixed identifications of brown character? Until now, theories of minoritarian desire have focused primarily on melancholia. Disidentification, as Muñoz understands it, has at bottom a melancholic structure: “like a melancholic subject holding on to a lost object, a disidentifying subject works to hold on to this object and invest it with new life.”⁵⁹ Elsewhere, Muñoz describes the “feeling of brownness” as a “depressive stance, a kind of feeling down.”⁶⁰ Anne Cheng’s seminal study of race and affect emphasizes racial melancholia as well. Relying partly on Sigmund Freud’s seminal theories, Cheng argues that “racial melancholia is both the technology and the nightmare of the American Dream,” defining “a complex process of racial rejection and desire on the parts of whites and nonwhites that expresses itself in abject and manic forms.”⁶¹

In “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), Freud makes a well-known distinction between these two psychic states: mourning is a conscious, healthy relation to loss in which the subject is able, after a period of bereavement, to find substitutes for the lost object; on the other hand, melancholia is a largely unconscious, pathological state of despair and inhibition in which the object-cathexis is withdrawn into the ego in a narcissistic self-identification. But Freud says very little about mania in this seminal essay, except to suggest that mania is the obverse of melancholia. The loss to which the melancholic succumbs is “mastered” or “thrust [] aside” in mania, resulting in the fact that “a volume of energy becomes available for manifold possible applications and ways of discharge. . . . characterized by high spirits, by the signs of discharge of joyful emotion, and by increased readiness to all kinds of action”; “the maniac plainly shows us that he has become free from the object by whom his suffering was caused, for he runs after new object-cathexes like a starving man after bread.”⁶²

Cheng attends briefly to these moments of manic irruption, particularly in her reading of the musical adaptation of *Flower Drum Song* (1961) and its vacillation between euphoric and dysphoric forms. “The very history of Asian immigration (itself far from homogenous) has often been solicited to inflect, on the part of the Asian immigrant, a manic relation to the American Dream,” Cheng writes, going on to point out that this “strain of Asian euphoria in America in turns serves to contain the history of Asian abjection, as well as to discipline other racialized groups in America.”⁶³ But the emphasis of her study is on a cluster of “blues” affect, racial grief being her main focus.

It is precisely this manic “strain” that is of interest to me. I do not divorce mania from melancholia. Instead, I seek to refocus critical attention from melancholia to mania. My work offers a way of thinking through mixed identifications that are not encompassed by present analyses of melancholia, which relegate mania to the status of a postscript. Freud himself has difficulty developing this concept. He prefaces his brief discussion of mania with a disclaimer (“I cannot promise that this attempt will prove entirely satisfying”) and ends mid-stride with another lengthy deferral (“we are forced to break off every investigation at some point until such time as the results of another attempt elsewhere can come to its aid”).⁶⁴ Returning to this subject in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), he writes that “we are without insight into the mechanism of the displacement of a melancholia by a mania” and that “the state of things is somewhat obscure.”⁶⁵ He intimates that there is a gap between the two, that mania is instigated “after termination of the work of melancholia.”⁶⁶

To explore brown character is to explore this terminus of melancholia in its own right. As opposed to the narcissistically bound melancholic, the manic has a hunger that is impossible to contain. In Freud's words, "the ego and the ego ideal have fused together, so that the person, in a mood of triumph and self-satisfaction, disturbed by no self-criticism, can enjoy the abolition of his inhibitions, his feelings of consideration for others, and his self-reproaches."⁶⁷ The brown characters I consider emblemize this mania in different ways. Rihani's *Superman of America* promises a universal transcendence, a transcontinental hybridism of new world and old that is triumphant, self-satisfied, and ultimately untenable. As I show in the readings that follow, these vast and unstable cathexes are as much a feature of Rihbany's conversion narrative as they are of Williams's enraptured descriptions of his mother's *mestizaje*.

There is now a vast body of scholarship showing how immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe socially constructed whiteness, transforming race into ethnicity. But we have yet to explore how non-European immigrants negotiated this boundary. It is clear that we must proceed with caution, given the fundamental insight of Michael Omi and Howard Winant's work on racial formation, which critiques the flawed logic of the "European immigrant analogy which suggested that racial minorities could be incorporated into American life in the same way that white ethnic groups had been."⁶⁸ They show how the ethnicity paradigm cannot convincingly account for racialization in the United States (particularly since the 1960s), cautioning against the "intense will to pound the square peg of race into the round hole of ethnicity."⁶⁹

Yet this will persists. Desire crosses delineations of the color-line. Race effectively morphs into ethnicity, as Koshy has so compellingly argued, taking as an example three vexed sites of Asian American racialization: naturalization claims by Asian immigrants at the turn of the century; Chinese claiming symbolic whiteness in Jim Crow Mississippi; and attempts by South Asian Americans to negotiate their Census classifications in 1970 when they were counted as "white." Koshy argues that forms of white privilege are changing with this "morphing of race into ethnicity":

Since European American ethnicity has achieved dominance as the paradigm of Americanness, it represents a very powerful solicitation to incoming immigrant groups who are caught in the process of recasting their identities and negotiating the terms of their Americanization. It offers a mythology of the American Dream that allows for their ethnicization rather than their racialization and ties the comforting vision of a continuity with the past (through ethnicity) to a promising future (through class mobility).⁷⁰

Brown characters help to produce this mythology. They occupy what Koshy describes as the "model minority position" in her comparative study of South Asian racialization across Britain and the United States, a position that "depends on the intermediary location of a group between black and white and holds a particularly powerful appeal to immigrant groups."⁷¹ Rather than associate this "intermediary location" with one or another ethnoracial grouping, I reconceive it as an opportunity for comparative readings: a problem-space within which the American dream finds new footing across a wide range of literary texts.

Hemispheric theorizations of *mestizaje* are indispensable here, insofar as they help us to develop a more robust account of liminal racialization in the United States to the extent that it engenders treacherous, controversial, or difficult desires. A hybrid position is not necessarily a resistant one, as Shalini Puri points out: "cultural hybridity does not only contain internal

epistemological contradictions and differences; epistemologically *similar* discourses of hybridity may be harnessed to quite different political projects (from bourgeois nationalism and dependent capitalism to socialism or fascism).⁷² In certain contexts, this intermediary position is in fact described as “brown.” Deborah Thomas’s Jamaica-based ethnography shows that “‘brown’ middle classes, seen as having originated from the free colored offspring of plantation owners and their slave concubines, have always occupied a rather problematic structural position in relation to the majority of the population.”⁷³ But the valences of brownness exceed this mixed-race ancestry. The “middle class,” “the more fortunate,” the “rich people,” the “upper sets,” are variations on the term, which is, in Thomas’s words, “as much a way of life as it is a phenotype.”⁷⁴

The challenge, as I see it, is to theorize the vexed desires that arise at these liminal sites. Brown characters emerge at the cusp of race and ethnicity. They disidentify with minoritarian identity, attempting to efface the stigma of racialization. Following Thomas, I am less interested in their “phenotype” or racial categorization than in their literary characterization. More to the point, I am interested in how their literary characterization is informed by racial categorization. The comparison I offer is based not on identity but on form: on the literary concept of character and characterization. As Rita Felski attests in her introduction to a recent volume of essays on character, the concept is far from exhausted: “literary character can disclose rather than disguise . . . via the specifics of its formal shaping, it offers otherwise unattainable insights into the historical inflection of personhood.”⁷⁵ This emphasis on form allows me to foreground the gap between author and text, and between autobiographical and fictive characters, all too often elided in studies of ethnic literature. For instance, I emphasize the distinction between Rihani and his characterization of the Superman of America by attending to the multiplicity of voices within *The Book of Khalid*, voices that not only produce but also undermine Khalid’s manic desire. A given text, *The Book of Khalid* in this case, represents a space within which Rihani’s relationship to brown character is developed and ultimately transformed.

In effect, we are dealing with a mythology of ethnicization, a mythology that literary criticism is well-poised to understand. As Rey Chow points out, “ethnicity” is a fundamentally “irrational” term: “ethnicity exists in modernity as a boundary—a line of exclusion—that nonetheless pretends to be a nonboundary—a framework of inclusion.”⁷⁶ Étienne Balibar’s notion of “fictive ethnicity” is relevant here. “I apply the term ‘fictive ethnicity’ to the community instituted by the nation-state,” Balibar writes, a community upon which the “nation form” is itself predicated.⁷⁷ Not only is imagination foundational, if we follow Benedict Anderson’s original insight, but fiction plays a constitutive role in the formation of ethnicity and the nation-state more broadly.⁷⁸ “Nations, then, are imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role,” as Timothy Brennan argues.⁷⁹

There is a general insight here that I would reshape to the specifics of my project, adapting Balibar’s concept to the fictive function of ethnicity in the United States in particular. For I am interested in the “fictive ethnicity” of racialized subjects, in the pretensions of minority immigrants considered to be outside the ambit of the “European immigrant analogy.” How do brown characters inhabit this nonboundary of race and ethnicity? This is doubtless a fantasy: a fantasy of the ubiquity of the American Dream, of ethnicization as available to all who seek it. And yet, it is a fantasy that traverses East-West and North-South topographies of immigration, that cuts across texts that are usually read distinctly from one another.⁸⁰ By studying the rich and varied recurrence of brown character in minority immigrant literature, I aim to deepen our sense of mixed identification and its

characterization on the part of minority subjects and, as I will show by way of conclusion, to develop a genealogy for the visibly racialized protagonist of the American dream.

Literature is a crucial site for the excavation of brown character. For we are dealing with the creative transformation of race into ethnicity. It is only by an effort of imagination that “the square peg of race” can fit into “the round hole of ethnicity.” The non-European immigrant can only claim a *fictive* ethnicity. This is a fiction that the writers I study expose to varying degrees. At one extreme is a figure like Saund, the first Asian American member of Congress, whose autobiography is part of his careful self-presentation as a figurative and literal representative of the American people. He is a self-made man. Literature becomes the site of the making of Americans, to evoke the title of Gertrude Stein’s colossal family history. The construction of fictive ethnicity involves fictive identifications, myths of origin, attributions of kinship, and figurations of birth and rebirth. The production of brown character becomes an act of poesis, intimately tied to a certain self-production. “Fathering tales I became rooted to the new land,” writes Villa in *Footnote to Youth*, linking his newfound nativity to the act of literary creation.⁸¹ In *Letters to Uncle Sam*, Rihani tears up his birth certificate even as he creates new documentation of his newfound allegiances. For some of the writers I treat, writing itself opens the way to social advancement: success in the pursuit offers a means to transform race into ethnicity. At the other extreme are writers like McKay and Marshall, theorists of brown character in their own right, who explore how brownness and blackness are transformed by one another. Marshall, for instance, builds in a powerful critique of mixed identification into the architectural space of the brownstone. Against Silla’s aspirations for upward mobility, Marshall juxtaposes Selina, the brown anti-hero who exposes the gutted remains of the American dream. The final image of the novel is a demolished brownstone, whose staircase stubbornly endures, testifying to the power and precariousness of mixed identification.

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53. Raúl Coronado, "A World Not to Come: Latina/o Literary History and Modernity" (working paper, TransAmerican Studies Working Group, Stanford University, May 4, 2010), 1, 3, 8.

54. María Carla Sánchez, "Whiteness Invisible: Early Mexican American Writing and the Color of Literary History," in *Passing: Identity and Interpretation in Sexuality, Race, and Religion*, ed. María Carla Sánchez and Linda Schlossberg (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 65, 78.

55. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 4, 19.

56. For more on how courts have policed this restricted domain, see López, *White by Law*. The appendix of racial prerequisite cases at the end of his book not only points to the vagaries of a juridical system bent upon justifying racism by convoluted legal logics, but also to the sheer number of intermediary groups between "black" and "white" who undertook to obtain citizenship by making claims to whiteness. As López notes, virtually no petitioners relied on "black" kinship to make their case despite the fact that after 1870 naturalization was available to "persons of African nativity, or African descent" (35, 31).

57. Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 18.

58. Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (New York: Dial, 2005), 3.

59. Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 12.

60. Muñoz, "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down," 676.

61. Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), xi.

62. Sigmund Freud, *General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 175, 176.

63. Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race*, 23.

64. Freud, *General Psychological Theory*, 174, 179.

65. Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1959), 64, 65.

66. Freud, *General Psychological Theory*, 179. Emphasis added.

67. Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, 64.

68. Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 12.

69. Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 48.

70. Susan Koshy, "Morphing Race into Ethnicity: Asian Americans and Critical Transformations of Whiteness,"

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71. Susan Koshy, "South Asians and the Complex Interstices of Whiteness: Negotiating Public Sentiment in the United States and Britain," in *White Women in Racialized Spaces: Imaginative Transformation and Ethical Action in Literature*, ed. Samina Najmi and Rajini Srikanth (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 29.

72. Shalini Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post-Nationalism, and Cultural Hybridity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 5.

73. Deborah A. Thomas, *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 51.

74. Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 24.

75. Rita Felski, "Introduction," *New Literary History* 42 (2011): v.

76. Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 28, 30.

77. Etienne Balibar, "The Nation Form: History and Ideology," in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, ed. Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (London: Verso, 1991), 96.

78. See generally Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised ed. (London: Verso, 1991).

79. Timothy Brennan, "The National Longing for Form," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 49.

80. For an overview of these topographies, see generally Ralph Bauer, "Hemispheric Studies," *PMLA* 124, no. 1 (January 2009): 234-250. Bauer points out that "the comparative hemispheric (North-South) approach has often stood in opposition to the transatlantic (East-West) or 'diasporic' models" (238).

81. José Garcia Villa, *Footnote to Youth: Tales of the Philippines and Others* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933), 303.

Chapter 1.

PROPHETS OF THE HOLY LAND Abraham Rihbany and Ameen Rihani's Arab Americanism

The frontispiece of Abraham Rihbany's 1914 autobiography, *A Far Journey*, shows him to have arrived at the inner sanctum of American life. Rihbany is seated at a desk in front of a shelf of books that place him in a home library or study. He wears a suit and tie and looks evenly at the reader with a pen and paper in hand. In the course of his narration, Rihbany mantles his journey to the West in progressively Western clothing: from the "European costume" he acquires at a missionary school in Syria to the "ill-fitting" hat (which gives him "a distinctly Occidental sensation"), to the "real white stiff-bosomed American shirt, a turn-down collar, and a four-in-hand necktie" that constitute, in his words, "a big step forward in my social evolution."¹ The frontispiece is the apogee of this evolution: ostensibly a small matter of putting on the right clothes. Along with Rihbany's impeccable costuming, the image draws attention to the act of writing itself, as if to suggest that the text that follows is testament to the author's outwardly transformation. It is precisely this testament that I study here, exploring Rihbany's careful self-portraiture in *A Far Journey* alongside the work of another Syrian immigrant writer, Ameen Rihani, who came to the United States around the same time. Both men are prophets of the Holy Land, who shape and are in turn shaped by a complex set of mediations between East and West, Orient and Occident, Syria and the United States.

Rihani and Rihbany were part of a larger migration of approximately 600,000 immigrants, who arrived in the Americas between 1860 and 1914 from the Ottoman province of Greater Syria, (encompassing modern-day Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestinian territories, and Syria).² By this time, the Middle East had long been open to Orientalist American consumption, as attested by the proliferation of travelogues, novels, panoramas, and photographs of the Holy Land in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Educated by American missionaries, many of these immigrants were schooled in mutual desire of the United States, although they were often made aware of the asymmetries of power that attended this relation as they fled the economic deprivations of a deteriorating Ottoman empire, divided by European interference, and sought to realize the promise of the American Dream. Newly arrived in a country rife with nativism and in the process of instituting a close to its open-door immigration policies, they found themselves subject to controversy. Their status within the national polity would be adjudicated in a series of cases addressing whether or not Syrians could naturalize, contingent upon their ability to prove themselves to be white. They would find themselves at the forefront of a developing Syrian and Arab nationalism, which partly looked to the United States to thwart European colonial designs over the region.

Those entering the United States relied on a large chain migration which brought them to the Northeast and Midwest, primarily through the Syrian colony in New York City, as they established themselves as pack peddlers and suppliers and increasingly branched out into trade and manufacturing, transitioning from what Alixa Naff describes as "the pioneer, or peddling, period," from 1880 to 1910, to the "settled period," from 1910 to 1930.³ These immigrants were primarily Christian, although a substantial number of Muslims also immigrated during this time, impelled not so much by sectarian religious conflict as by socioeconomic reasons linked to the restructuring of the Ottoman empire due, in part, to European intervention.⁴ A fairly high number of women

immigrated as well, constituting about one-third of those entering the United States.⁵ Immigration flows resumed after World War I—though in smaller numbers, as many Syrians left in protest against French and British mandatory governments established in the region—only to be curtailed by the Immigration Act of 1924, which limited Syrian entrants to a yearly quota of one hundred.⁶ Sources differ widely as to the number of Syrians who ultimately established themselves in the U.S., ranging from as low as 46,727, according to the 1910 Census, to as high as 200,000, according to a historian writing in 1924.⁷

Syrians posed a notable challenge to extant racial formations. “Others didn’t know whether to call us white, brown, or yellow,” one Syrian immigrant recalls.⁸ An 1895 *New York Times* article describing the inhabitants of the Syrian enclave in New York registers this confusion, noting that “a good many of them are easily distinguishable by a rather dark complexion, and might by some be taken for Italians or Frenchmen from the South of France, but not a few are of quite light complexion, with light-colored hair.”⁹ Disparaged as “dago,” “sheeny,” “Turk,” or “niggers” by the general populace, these immigrants met with a similarly inconsistent fate in the offices of immigration: they were variously classified alongside other Ottoman subjects under the category “Turkey in Asia” before 1899; distinctly as “Syrian” and “Palestinian” after 1899; as “Asiatics” by the U.S. Census Bureau in 1910; and as “Foreign-born white” in 1920.¹⁰ Syrians were not included in the Asiatic barred zone formalized in the Immigration Act of 1917 and were thereby associated with a new formation, that of the near or middle East, as opposed to the far East, the prime target of exclusion.¹¹ The classification of Syrians as “Asiatics” brought about what Naff refers to as a “‘yellow race’ crisis” in Syrian naturalization, threatening to include Syrians within the purview of Asian exclusion.¹² A series of cases from 1909 to 1915 addressed the question of whether or not Syrians were “white” and therefore eligible for citizenship.¹³ In this context, judges routinely “read” the petitioners’ appearance, trying to slot them into extant racial categories. In his 1909 decision, District Judge Newman described Costa Najour as follows: “He is not particularly dark, and has none of the characteristics or appearance of the Mongolian race, but, so far as I can see and judge, has the appearance and characteristics of the Caucasian race.”¹⁴ Syrians were ultimately successful in their campaign for naturalization, but this was a limited, juridical whiteness, as Syrians continued to bear the brunt of nativism and racism.¹⁵

With this immigration, several writers joined the *mahjar*, or Arab diasporic, literary scene, including Kahlil Gibran, Jamil Holway, Afifa Karam, Elia Abu Madi, Mikhail Naimy, Rihani, Rihbany, and Salom Rizk among others. They published widely in Arabic and in English and were featured in the vibrant Arabic press as well as in more mainstream publications such as *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper’s Magazine*. A number joined together in the *Arrabitah* or New York Pen League, which Gibran helped organize in 1920.¹⁶ Naimy, a well-known writer, chronicler, and likely the first critic of the League, paints a lively picture of his compatriots gathered in the offices of *As-Sayeh*, a journal they published, poring over Arabic newspapers and magazines from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and South America as they sought to launch a formal revolution in Arabic literature around the globe.¹⁷ Drawing upon a wide range of influences, from the Syrian literary revival in Cairo to Whitmanian free verse, their works circulated widely in the United States and in the Arab world, inspiring the formation of a similar league in Damascus.¹⁸

Many of these writers came out of U.S. missionary schools in Greater Syria or were shaped by the general perception of the United States as a benevolent force in the region, in contrast to meddlesome European powers believed to be acting in their own interests.¹⁹ They sought to actively

define the relationship between Syria and the United States in the context of broader debates in the *mahjar* about the status of Arabs in the homeland before and after the dissolution of the Ottoman empire.²⁰ For instance, Abu Madi, forced into exile by Ottoman authorities due to a provocative volume of poems, became a “fervent American patriot,” in the words of one critic, and wrote an encomium to the flag in Arabic, proclaiming the United States “the best sanctuary”; Holway wrote the as yet untranslated *al-Muhajir al-Suri* (1910) and also worked as an interpreter and examiner in the Immigration Service starting in 1907, later serving in the “Fight for Freedom” drive for the U.S. Office of War Information during World War II.²¹ The Pen League collaborated on a special 1916 edition of *al-Funun* dedicated to the victims of famine in Mount Lebanon when it was cut off by the Allied blockade of Turkish-held ports during World War I.²² Gibran was particularly active during this period, promoting the anticolonial struggle against the Ottoman empire, calling for Christian and Muslim solidarity, and organizing relief efforts for victims of the famine.²³ Hopes for Arab self-determination flared with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, but the highly popular Arab regime installed after the war was overthrown and French and British mandatory rule was instituted over the region.²⁴

Rihani and Rihbany occupied different roles in this context. Their comparison illuminates the broad range of early Syrian literary production arising from very different milieus: member of the League for a time, Rihani was part of a cosmopolitan literati versed in a range of literary traditions from classical Arabic poetry to European philosophy to American Transcendentalism; Rihbany moved in very different circles, ministering to congregations from Michigan to Massachusetts while becoming a foremost authority on the Bible. They became increasingly active during World War I, calling for the United States to intervene in the Middle East and thwart the advance of European colonialism and working to join the prospect of a liberated Syria to Allied aims. In *Militant America and Jesus Christ* (1917), Rihbany relied on his cultural authority as a native of the Holy Land to argue for the compatibility of Christian principles with U.S. entry into the war; in *America Save the Near East* (1918) he sought to effect the “deliverance” of Syria from Turkish and European rule, figuring himself as one of a number on “the trail of the Pilgrims” in the course of making these claims.²⁵ He attended the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 as a representative of Syrian societies in the United States, an experience he described in *Wise Men from the East and from the West* (1922), which is highly critical of the mandate system and of British support of Zionism and stands firm in the conviction that “the West has no right, either moral or legal, to rule the East.”²⁶ While Rihbany lived out his life in the United States, Rihani returned to his birthplace in modern-day Lebanon, becoming a scholar and activist of international renown.²⁷ He traveled, published, and advocated internationally on behalf of Pacifism and Arab self-determination, and against state Zionism. He was dismayed by the assimilation of Syrian immigrants and grew increasingly critical of U.S. involvement in the Middle East.²⁸ As Geoffrey Nash points out, Rihani moved away from “his earlier *mahjar* universalism” and became “more the polemicist than the conciliator, more the agitator than the mediator.”²⁹

These Syrian immigrant writers are beginning to receive attention today by critics working to constitute Arab American literature as a field.³⁰ In this context, some of the early twentieth century texts have been given renewed life. Rihbany’s *The Syrian Christ* (1916) was republished in 2003 with the hope of mitigating the “dangerous divide between East and West,” as the publisher puts it.³¹ The recent centenary of the publication of Rihani’s novel, *The Book of Khalid* (1911) provides “an extraordinary opportunity to raise his cultural profile and communicate his message of dialogue and

unity between East and West,” according to the organizers of Project Khalid, which seeks to commemorate this occasion.³² Nouri Gana points out that “the task of Muslim and Arab writing is nowadays to wager more programmatically on formal adventurousness in order to wrest the universal humanity of Muslim and Arab suffering from the grinding machinery of the war on terror.”³³ This task has much in common with Arab American literature of the latter part of the twentieth century, shaped by the new immigration of Arab Muslims, refugees, and political dissidents following the Israeli occupation and U.S. neocolonial intervention in the Middle East.

But it is hard to reconcile early Syrian immigrant literature with this effort. For instance, Wail Hassan, finds Rihani’s work to be limited by Orientalist dichotomies in the terms of Edward Said’s influential paradigm, arguing that he “offers an illusory sense of freedom that sublimates the dialectics of history”; early Syrian writers bring Arab American literature to something of a “dead end” in his account, representing a “burdensome, embarrassing” past with which the generations following must contend.³⁴ The unabashed Orientalism—not to mention conservative, even imperialist, Americanism—of many of these early writers does not lend them to easy incorporation within a field shaping itself in political solidarity with Arab Americans. Their Christian identifications further threaten to obscure Islam’s relation to Arab American subjection. These are not seamlessly oppositional figures and, as such, they pose a challenge for an academic field trying to find the cultural coordinates of its own resistance to the repressions of the U.S. nation-state.

I address this challenge here by reading the pioneering work of Rihbany and Rihani within the comparative framework of brown character. I begin by focusing on two significant firsts, Rihbany’s *A Far Journey* and Rihani’s *The Book of Khalid*, which have the status of being the first Arab American autobiography and the first Arab American novel, respectively. I then turn to a slim epistolary volume, *Letters to Uncle Sam*, written by Rihani from 1917 to 1919, on the eve of the entry of the United States into World War I. I focus on autobiographical and fictive constructions of brown character in these works. The majority-identified minority subject emerges out of a particular concatenation of Arab and America at the turn of the century, comprising a proliferation of myths of origin, figurations of birth and rebirth, and attributions of kinship. I show how Rihani and Rihbany cathect around the promise represented by the United States in a world emerging from the old European colonial order. They seek to enlist U.S. hegemony in the service of an anticolonial, Arab nationalist project, mediating the contradictions of this effort by their production of brown character. In effect, they are concerned with discovering how they might come to the United States through Syria and to Syria through the United States. Brown character, I argue, is produced at the juncture of this circularity. I explore the implications of this characterization for the study of American Orientalism and discourses of immigration and nativity.

Being Born Again

A Far Journey recounts Rihbany’s birth in El-Shweir and his youth in Syria, leading up to his immigration to New York City in 1891 and his appointment as minister of the Church of the Disciples in Boston several years later. Rihbany details, in Biblical cadences, his early involvement with the Greek Orthodox Church into which he is born, his conversion to Protestantism, and the various spiritual trials and revelations he undergoes when he leaves the Syrian enclave. He travels across Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Iowa, and Michigan as a lecturer on the “Orient” until he finds his ministerial calling.

“I am not writing a diary of events but trying to make a confession of faith,” he claims (*FJ*, 329). Indeed, the text proceeds in the vein of Augustinian spiritual autobiography, animating the life as a religious journey which ends, through a series of conversions, in spiritual and worldly fulfillment. It buttresses colonial new world settlement with divine sanction in a specifically Anglo-American Protestant tradition, representing, in the words of Sacvan Bercovitch, “the American self as the embodiment of a prophetic universal design.”³⁵ It is not surprising that Rihbany describes “Congregational Protestantism and Americanism” as his two defining “teachers” (*FJ*, 331-32). Congregationalism, with its claim to the founding Puritan lineage, likely provides Rihbany with a continuity between church and country; he has only to avail himself of what Tracy Fessenden calls the “Protestant-secular continuum” in order to join both the religious and national elect.³⁶ I argue that *A Far Journey* refashions Rihbany as a brown character—a properly “American” religious and national subject. It does this by staging a series of continual conversions, both sacred and profane. Rihbany comes to have “the privilege of being born again in a land which more than any other on our planet establishes the truth of the New Testament promise” (*FJ*, 276). This privilege designates Rihbany’s tenuous claim to majoritarian identity: he can be reborn anew in this new land and can therefore claim to be “native” to it.

Rihbany’s early conversion to Protestantism literally opens the way for his immigration. In the aptly named chapter “A New Light,” he elaborates his decision to leave the Greek Orthodox faith partly as a result of his schooling under American Presbyterian missionaries. Fittingly, this chapter closes with his first extended vision of the United States such that Rihbany seems predestined for the new world by dint of his new faith. He comes to have a stake in this new world by the same logic, which figures the familiar landmarks of immigration as sites of conversion. Shortly after his arrival in New York, Rihbany finds himself in Battery Park, lonely and penniless, with “no share” in the landscape before him; then, “as by a miracle,” he realizes that the “beauty of the sea and sky seemed to have been made for me; I was owner of all that I saw” (*FJ*, 205, 206). Rihbany comes into his own, so to speak, through a characteristically Anglo-American Protestant spiritual revelation (“without Bible, preacher, priest, or sacrament”) that reads in the new world landscape the signs of divine grace (*FJ*, 207).³⁷ His naturalization, a mere six weeks after his arrival in the United States, is described with sacramental effusion. “My heart never thrilled with holier emotion than when I assented to the oath of allegiance,” Rihbany writes (*FJ*, 218). In the pages following, he travels from town to town with his “pilgrim staff” in hand, enduring penury and extremes of cold and struggling to learn English—the “pains of my second birth into the new environment,” as he puts it, which culminate in his calling to join and lead his new congregation (*FJ*, 300, 258). Rihbany entwines his ministerial duties with overtly political exercises, participating eagerly in electoral politics, speaking publicly on behalf of the gold standard, and demonstrating his readiness to enlist in the 1898 war with Spain. The immigrant’s journey is figured as an allegory of pilgrim’s progress, entailing religious and secular transformations, that ends in the absolution of new world nativity.

This production of belonging entails the production of alienage as well, as the scene of Rihbany’s naturalization initially reveals. No sooner than he takes the oath of allegiance, a fundamental change comes over him. “I felt such an inward sense of relief and exaltation that my countryman, the interpreter, appeared to me to be an alien,” he writes (*FJ*, 218). By the grace of his naturalization, he is a man apart, as though this rite bestows upon him a nativist view, sanctioning a breach between him and his fellow Syrians.

In the chapter, “Out from My Kindred,” he resolves to leave the Syrian enclave and the peddling networks that have hitherto supported him. At a time when images of the “Street Arab” and the “dirty stain . . . of the Arab tribe” were vividly popularized by Jacob Riis’s muckraking ventures, Rihbany would no doubt have wanted to dissociate himself from this site.³⁸ He figures himself as one of a “small minority of eager, aggressive idealists, whose restless spirits . . . respond with avidity to the challenges of a higher civilization. To such the word America soon takes the form of Opportunity, and is understood in terms of incentive and room for soul expansion” (*FJ*, 245). These spiritual aspirations are subtended by a Social Darwinism that denounces the “lower regions’ of American cities,” these “haunts of vice and crime,” as the precondition for “the birth of a new species” of American (*FJ*, 245, 243). It is in his strategic interest that Rihbany not bear the brunt of nativism but, rather, ventriloquize its concerns. He is sanguine about the outcome of his departure. “The occasions on which I was made to feel that I was a foreigner—an alien—were so rare that they are not worth mentioning,” he writes; “the large warm heart of America . . . made me forget that there was an ‘immigration problem’ within the borders of this great Commonwealth” (*FJ*, 278). He mentions the “immigration problem” only to demonstrate that he has left it behind.

Rihbany arrays a profoundly hierarchical view of New York in these pages. In a letter to a friend, he describes the city as composed of “three cities on top of one another” with the highest, the city in the air, inhabited by seemingly inaccessible “*jinn*”; even the “magical” women on the streets wear “thin veils” in a show of their inaccessible beauty (*FJ*, 202-3). This is the stuff of the American dream, peopled by chimeras who are as distant from him as the mythical jinn. “I seemed to be almost as far from the real life of America as if I had been living in Beyrout or Tripoli,” Rihbany writes (*FJ*, 242). It is apparent to Rihbany that he must come out from among the “multitude of Irish, Italians, Poles, Russians, Chinese, and other human elements” in the enclave and seek “real American families” in “the smaller centers of population, where men came in friendly touch with one another, daily” (*FJ*, 246). No matter that he initially takes the well-worn path of the Syrian peddler. He will soon claim for himself the prerogative of the “type” of the “talented foreigner,” as he puts it in the Preface, who can testify “to the unparalleled opportunities of America” at every turn (*FJ*, viii). By his own estimation, Rihbany meets with mercurial success as he secures invitations to a number of American homes, rubs shoulders with “real” Americans (even enlisting their testimony on his behalf), and ultimately joins the American family by marrying an “Aryan” wife (*FJ*, 319).

As I point out earlier, the frontispiece of *A Far Journey* attests to this transformation—to Rihbany’s literal and symbolic investiture of American identity. This is a far cry from the image of the poor, racialized immigrant, surprised by the glare of Riis’s flash in the depths of the New York tenement. Rihbany’s posture and posturing, his traversal of the hierarchical logics that order American society, are a feature of his brown character. He is able to part the “thin veils” of American life (which are less immovable than the Du Boisian veil the black man encounters). The “form of Opportunity” that America takes for Rihbany is entailed in his production of brown character. He reads in the “word America” a pledge of “soul expansion,” which also involves expansion of his social circle and financial means. One of a “small minority” he nonetheless renders his story large than life, playing the part not of an “individual” but of a “type.”

Rihbany’s mobility is contingent upon his disavowal of Syrian racialization. As I note above, he is careful to chart his assumption of increasingly Western clothes. His suit and tie in the frontispiece appear to be a second skin. His choice of clothing progressively unveils his whiteness to be a foregone conclusion. In effect, he imagines his racial identity to be sartorial rather than

epidermal—a marker of difference he is able to remove at will. This is not a vision shared by the other characters in the autobiography. For instance, his marriage is disparaged by a local newspaper editor who reports it under the headline, “An Ohio School Teacher Has Poor Taste” (*FJ*, 319). This charge impinges upon Rihbany’s self-consciousness to such an extent that he feels compelled to include it within the purview of his autobiography. He recurses to the language of Christian forgiveness: “I have already forgiven him, for he knew not what he did—he never saw me” (*FJ*, 319). The suggestion that he will be vindicated by his appearance confirms that a vindication is, in fact, necessary. This instability is a feature of Rihbany’s brown character. Try as he might, it is quite possible that the reader will “see and judge” him, in the words of Judge Newman, to be other than white. As Sirène Harb argues, Rihbany “vacillates between the poles of belonging and exclusion,” continuing to be “revolted by the stigma of Syrianness affecting the authentication of his American citizenship.”³⁹

The discursive effort of Rihbany’s autobiography belies his seemingly naive faith in appearances. The following climactic scene, to which the entirety of *A Far Journey* seems to tend, reminds us of the instability of the text’s production of brown character. Rihbany describes his repeated attempts to sing convincingly along with a popular patriotic song:

The line “Land where my fathers died” stuck in my throat. I envied every person in that audience who could sing it truthfully. For years afterward, whenever I tried to sing those words, I seemed to myself to be an intruder. At last a new light broke upon my understanding. At last I was led to realize that the fathers of my new and higher self did live and die in America. I was born in Syria as a child, but I was born in America as a man. All those who fought for the freedom I enjoy, for the civic ideals I cherish, for the simple but lofty virtues of the typical American home which I love, were *my fathers!* Therefore, I could sing the words “Land where my fathers died” with as much truth and justice as the words, “Land of the pilgrim’s pride.” (*FJ*, 285-86)

For years he has tried to sing this song as an authentic American. He seems to be thwarted in his efforts until he is able “at last” to find his voice. What exactly occasions this transformation is unclear. This is an uncharacteristic elision in a book so diligently concerned to detail epiphany, religious or otherwise. It seems as though a “new light” has dawned upon him, as if for the first time. This is a reference to Rihbany’s previous conversions, whether the new light that first brings him to Protestantism and then to the United States or the new light of his vision in Battery Park. He is reborn again and again in a series of continual conversions that reveal his Americanness to be iterative, rather than definitively transformative. We are reminded of the full force of his autobiography, his production and reproduction of brown character, enlightening not only him in this moment but, more importantly, us, his readers. For it is in writing *A Far Journey* that Rihbany finds his singing voice. Reborn into a “new and higher self,” he can with Whitmanian conviction sing America as his fatherland, claiming a nativity that does not belong to him by birthright. The pride of place of his pilgrim forefathers is his to inherit, that is if we take his word as gospel.

Superman of America

In contrast to Rihbany's religious account of his immigration, *The Book of Khalid* presents the loosely spiritual story of a wandering prophet. Part bildungsroman, picaresque, and immigration narrative, *The Book of Khalid* follows the prophet's life from his birth in Baalbek to his eventual disappearance in the Libyan desert, treating his immigration with Shakib to New York City, his brief stints as a merchant, peddler, law clerk, and Tammany Hall politico, his subsequent return to Baalbek and the Lebanon mountains for a period of recovery, and his disastrous reentry into Syrian revolutionary politics. If Rihbany looks forward to the new world as to the City on the Hill, divining the terms of his own settlement within its bounds, Rihani repeatedly calls the promise of a new world paradise into question. Even as the New York Harbor comes into view, Khalid dreams of the "City on the Hills of the Cedar Groves," seeing a vision of his future in the world he has left behind.⁴⁰ The text presents itself largely as a narrative of return, preferring to describe its characters as "emigrants," oriented by their departure from Syria rather than by their arrival in the United States.

Unlike Rihbany, who finds ample resources in canonical Protestantism, Rihani (a Maronite Christian by birth) identifies with an eclectic spirituality, a self-described mix of "Animistic, Adonistic, Monotheistic, Christian, Islamic, and Sufi" beliefs, as he puts it in a 1910 essay entitled "Who am I?"⁴¹ He figures *The Book of Khalid* as a "World-Temple" on "the border-line of the Orient and Occident," employing a number of spiritual and religious traditions from American Transcendentalism to German mysticism to Sufism to Wahhabi Islam (*BK*, 3). Like other luminaries of the "East" who came to their "native" religion through the Orientalist spirituality of the "West," Rihani became interested in Muhammad through Thomas Carlyle to whom he was introduced by Ralph Waldo Emerson.⁴² Indeed, the text is composed in similarly combinative circumstances for Rihani wrote *The Book of Khalid* in Syria, where he had returned for a second time since his initial immigration to the United States in 1888, in the course of peregrinations much like those Khalid undertakes.

Whereas *A Far Journey* can be said to be conversional, Rihani's ambition is "translational," to use Hassan's words, "part of the effort to forge a new language that would serve as the vehicle of a new genre, the Arabized English novel, or the Arabic novel written in English," representing "a literary synthesis of East and West that heralds the cultural and political synthesis that he envisioned."⁴³ Critics tend to read *The Book of Khalid* as the realization of this synthesis, part of Rihani's lifelong efforts at "bridging East and West," as one collection describes them, addressing the "tolerance," "East-West reconciliation," "belonging," and "universalism" that is the ambition of Rihani's oeuvre.⁴⁴ But these tributes tend to elide the gaps and fissures in the universalist vision of *The Book of Khalid*, particularly insofar as these are built into the very form of the novel. This objection registers among the critics themselves. As Halim Barakat points out, Rihani "clearly saw contradictions and conflicts of interests rather than a cooperative family of nations seeking justice for all humanity."⁴⁵

Whereas Barakat reads a revolutionary ambition into Khalid's universalism, I explore the latter's strategic deployment of an Americanism that is of Rihani's own making. Far from being a universal proposition, "Khalidism" inaugurates a geopolitical alliance between Syria and the United States involving the formation of an Arab empire with American aid (*BK*, 300). Khalid is the emblematic brown character: born and reborn of Syria and the United States, he is all the better positioned to conceive the prospect of this alliance between his two motherlands under the emblem

of universalism. Rihani, however, questions Khalid's universalist aspirations, building his skepticism into the narrative structure itself.

The Book of Khalid is pieced together out of three voices: a wry Editor who orchestrates the entire work for the reader; the prophet Khalid, whose mercurial and mystical manuscript the Editor liberally cites in translation; and Shakib, Khalid's poet-companion, whose adoring biography of Khalid supplies further detail. From the very beginning, the novel draws attention to its own construction. The Editor explains how he found Khalid's manuscript in the Khedivial Library in Cairo and hired an amanuensis to make a copy thereof. This copy is the "warp of our material," he writes, the "Loom" being his contribution, and the product "such a mixture that here and there the raw silk of Syria is often spun with the cotton and wool of America" (*BK*, v). To this combination, he soon adds another voice: Shakib's *Histoire Intime*, which furnishes "*les dessous de cartes* of his character" (*BK*, 11). This then is the challenge the Editor poses: to discover for himself and the reader the inside perspective on Khalid's character. Indeed, Khalid is constantly being made and remade in these many strands of narrative as *The Book of Khalid* builds a singular characterization out of multiple points of view.

The action of the novel builds with a series of natal tropes that find fruition in Khalid's rebirth, midwived by the vicissitudes of his own immigration. This climactic event is preceded by several thwarted adventures over the course of which Khalid grows increasingly expectant. Battery Park is a seminal site of this expectancy. But Khalid finds little to affirm him here. His unfulfilled desire for the promenading women prompts him to write a free verse poem, "Dream of Cyclamens," a pastoral encomium that returns him to an Edenic Baalbek and his youthful intimacy with its feminized landscape, which is interrupted when he is snatched up by a "goblin" and left tongue-tied among the women of Battery Park, longing for his "own land"; "Shades of Whitman!" the Editor exclaims immediately following the poem, acknowledging the influence of Walt Whitman upon Khalid's loose and energetic lines (*BK*, 51, 50).⁴⁶ This poetic detour within the prose text is startling, not the least because it opens up something new in Khalid. "He feels the embryo stir within him," the Editor writes, "and in the squeamishness of encephalopathy, he asks but for a few of the fruits of knowledge" (*BK*, 51).

Whereas Rihani's experience of Battery Park confirms his stake in the new world, Khalid is stirred by his imagined return to the old world. Whitmanian verse provides the formal template for this journey, freeing Khalid from a set of prose constraints in order that he might be transported from New York to Baalbek and back again. Battery Park becomes the site of this hybrid revelation, at the level of both form and content. Rihani increasingly uses a rarefied vocabulary to quite literally impregnate Khalid with the possibility of his own spiritual rebirth: he is in a state of "spiritual encephalopathy," carrying a "palingenetic burden" or "soul-fetus," constantly suffering from "puerperal pains of mind" (*BK*, 47, 55, 64, 66). He portrays Khalid as a feminized surrogate who is at once expecting and expected, as though pregnant with his own nativity.

These expectations bear fruit in the wake of Khalid's involvement with Tammany politics, which lands him in jail on the trumped up charge of misappropriating public funds. In the context of a longer diatribe against American materialism and democracy during his imprisonment, Khalid reaches a remarkable conclusion:

"But my faith in man," he swears, "is as strong as my faith in God. And as strong, too, perhaps, is my faith in the future world-ruling destiny of America. . . . Ay, in this New

World, the higher Superman shall rise. And he shall not be of the tribe of Overmen of the present age, of the beautiful blond beast of Zarathustra, who would riddle mankind as they would riddle wheat or flour; nor of those political moralists who would reform the world as they would a parish.

“From his transcendental height, the Superman of America shall ray forth in every direction the divine light, which shall mellow and purify the spirit of Nations and strengthen and sweeten the spirit of men. In this New World, I tell you, he shall be born, but he shall not be an American in the Democratic sense. He shall be nor of the Old World nor of the New; he shall be, my Brothers, of both. In him shall be reincarnated the Asiatic spirit of origination, of Poesy and Prophecy, and the European spirit of Art, and the American spirit of Invention. Ay, the Nation that leads the world to-day in material progress shall lead it, too, in the future, in the higher things of the mind and soul.” (*BK*, 113-14)

Khalid’s birthing pains are fulfilled in this “prophecy,” as the Editor describes it, which heralds the rise of the Superman of America out of precisely those “lower regions” that so horrify Rihbany (*BK*, 113). This is a composite figure, Byronic and Nietzschean, evocative of what David Morse describes as the “Transcendental Supermen” of Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Whitman in its unrestrained appeal to a higher unity through an exalted, but nonetheless human, agency.⁴⁷ It is quite likely that this figure emerges in dialogue with contemporaneous debates around the new immigration, representing a vision of American society that can be located somewhere between melting pot and cultural pluralist paradigms.⁴⁸ Rihani takes up these terms directly in a volume of essays published a few years later, *The Path of Vision* (1921), parts of which were written around this time, imagining that the American “Melting Pot,” “impregnated with alien influences, will embody . . . a universal consciousness, multifarious, multicolor, prismatic.”⁴⁹ The Superman of America seems to incarnate this prismatic universalism, conjoining the best of old world and new, presaging a Hegelian synthesis of Orientalist binaries, signifying a great transcontinental hybridity, personifying, in effect, the marvel of Rihani’s translational imperative.

Not only is Africa notably absent from this transcontinental synthesis, Khalid’s universalist vision is further limited by its resolutely American provenance. Disenchanted by the dubious naturalization Tammany Hall affords immigrants, Khalid conceives a new world autochthon and goes on to identify himself as such, personifying the majoritarian identifications of brown character.⁵⁰ As Khalid puts it while reflecting upon his rebirth, he is borne of “this dumb-hearted mother, this America, in whose iron loins I have been spiritually conceived” (*BK*, 127). It is not surprising that this “iron-loined spiritual Mother” (as the Editor refers to her elsewhere) propagates America’s “future world-ruling destiny” (*BK*, 145). This is a timely ambition, coming as it does with the announcement of the end of the American frontier by Frederick Jackson Turner at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. It resonates with aspects of cultural pluralism that conjoined American transnationalism with exceptionalist imperialism. Randolph Bourne’s famous 1916 description of America as a “trans-nationality of all the nations,” for instance, also celebrates the American as “a colonial of the world,” claiming that “the returning immigrant is often a missionary to an inferior civilization.”⁵¹ *A Path of Vision* similarly predicts that “the voice of America . . . is destined to become the voice of the world.”⁵² This expansionist metonymy, which allows Rihani to overleap “America” for the “world,” structures Khalid’s jail-house vision as well. The Columbian

figure of the Superman is an emblem of brown character.⁵³ His universalist reach is predictably imperialist: there is no direction that is not open to “divine light” of the Superman of America.

Much like “the returning immigrant” in Bourne’s account, Khalid leaves shortly after his release for Syria. On his return voyage, he reroutes his newfound American nativity back to Syria through an elaborate genealogy:

After all, I must love the Americans, for they are my Phoenician ancestors incarnate. Ay, there is in the nature of things a mysterious recurrence which makes for a continuous, everlasting modernity. And I believe that the spirit which moved those brave sea-daring navigators of yore, is still working lustily, bravely, but alas, not joyously—bitterly, rather, selfishly, greedily—behind the steam engine, the electric motor, the plough, and in the clinic and the studio as in the Stock Exchange. (*BK*, 140)

This description draws upon a contemporaneous discourse that figured Phoenicians as the first Caucasians to arrive in the Americas and Syrian immigrants as descendants of these early, adventuresome traders.⁵⁴ Khalid’s “palingenetic burden” is unpacked in this recapitulation of ancestral forms. Heir to the ancient Phoenician and the modern American, Khalid will now bring their combined energies to bear upon Syria.

He is not equal to this task until his sequestration in the Lebanon mountains which provides the setting for yet another rebirth. In “My Native Terraces, or Spring in Syria,” as Khalid titles his description of this period, we find him recuperating from his recent misadventures and hatching new plans for his return to civilization (*BK*, 182). There follows yet another climax in which Khalid declares his aim to “rear an altar to the Soul in the temple of Materialism, and an altar to Materialism in the temple of the Soul,” proclaiming himself to be “a citizen of two worlds—a citizen of the Universe” (*BK*, 236-7). Sprung from a New York prison and the terraces of Lebanon, Khalid overleaps these “two worlds” for the “Universe.” It seems he has arrived at the apogee of universalism prophesied for the Superman of America.

The Book of Khalid does not, in my view, see these hopes fulfilled. Khalid’s triumphant reentry into the fray of Syrian revolutionary politics is a failure. This is likely the period of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, during which a coalition of various reform groups unseated Sultan Abdülhamid II and put in place of his absolutist Islamic policies a more liberal and modernizing program intended to advance Turkish nationalism. This nationalism combined a somewhat secularized version of Hamidian Ottomanism with the principles of European constitutionalism, increasingly tending toward the exclusion of non-Turkish Muslim, non-Muslim, Arab, and other ethnic proto-nationalist groups.⁵⁵ Khalid advances an unpopular view in this context, urging everyone to “cease rejoicing in the Dastur,” or constitution, and seek spiritual freedom instead (*BK*, 288). In his version of Lutheran Reformism, a “political revolution must always be preceded by a spiritual one” (*BK*, 290). It turns out that this spiritual revolution is a “Dream of Empire” in a chapter bearing that title: “The soul of the East—The mind of the West—the builder of a great Empire. The triumph of the Idea, the realisation of a great dream: the rise of a great race who has fallen on evil days; the renaissance of Arabia; the reclaiming of her land; the resuscitation of her glory;—and why not? especially if backed with American millions” (*BK*, 301). Khalid foresees the rise of “an Arab Empire” helped by “American arms and an up-to-date Korân” and modernized by the Wahhabism of “Abd’ul-Wahhab . . . the Luther of Arabia” (*BK*, 303). It is here that the ends of

Khalid's mixed identifications are clarified. His aspirational universalism founders on a specific geopolitical alliance between Syria and the United States, entailing the overthrow of Ottoman colonialism and the establishment of an Arab empire in its stead. In effect, the Superman of America seeks to build an Arabism out of his Americanism, claiming the prerogative of his majoritarian identifications to realize an Arab empire midwifed by the United States.

The novel is quite skeptical about Khalid's desires. The transcendental reach of the Superman of America is undercut by a "subtranscendental" imperative effected by the tripartite narration of the text. I take this term from the title of the chapter following Khalid's imprisonment wherein the Editor likens him to Hamlet, "always soliloquising, tearing a passion to rags," and Shakib diagnoses him with "spasms and strange hallucinations" (*BK*, 115, 116). The pastoral interregnum in the Lebanon mountains is accompanied by similarly deflating correctives. In the Editor's words, "Khalid, though always invoking the distant luminary of transcendentalism for light, can not arrogate to himself this high title. . . . Hallucinated, moonstruck Khalid, your harmonising and affinitative efforts do not always succeed" (*BK*, 244). The segmented narration of the novel enables Rihani to construct Khalid's brown character while at the same time diagnosing his mixed identifications as madness. In other words, the Superman of America is countenanced within the space of his self-characterization but denounced by the competing voices within the text. If *A Far Journey's* characterization of mixed identification is understood as iterative, then *The Book of Khalid's* characterization of mixed identification might well be understood as interruptive, proceeding with a series of ironically qualified outbursts that never seem to arrive at a realizable end.

Indeed *The Book of Khalid* concludes that the world is not ripe for Khalidism, condemning its progenitor to an exilic fate. The Editor speculates that Khalid "might have entered a higher spiritual circle or a lower; of a truth, he is not now on the outskirts of the desert: deeper to this side or to that he must have passed" (*BK*, 348). Khalid might well be higher or lower, to this side or the other, but he is *nowhere* at present, even on the outskirts of the outskirts. Despite his excess of nativity, Khalid does not belong. Even within the fantasy of the text, Khalidism, with all its grand ambitions, remains a fantasy once removed.

Syria's Uncle Sam

I would now like to turn to Rihani's *Letters to Uncle Sam*, which offers an autobiographical addendum to his fictive construction of brown character in *The Book of Khalid*. Published only recently, the text consists of four letters addressed to "Uncle Sam" prompted by the entry of the United States into World War I in 1917. "I have torn up my birth certificate, Uncle," Rihani writes in the first letter, as though asserting the prerogative of majoritarian identification.⁵⁶ He informs Uncle Sam that he has been transformed from "an adopted child, an outsider, an alien American at best" to "one of your children, a recognized member of your esteemed household," quitting Andalusian Spain, home to his Arab ancestors, and returning forthwith to the United States (*LS*, 11). He goes on to describe his journey to New York city and his subsequent attempts to serve the war cause by organizing Syrian immigrants in the Mexican state of Yucatán into a pro-Allied league.

In what follows, I read *Letters to Uncle Sam* as a postscript to the dilemma posed by the fictive Khalid, exploring Rihani's production of brown character within the autobiography of his own life. Majoritarian identification becomes explicitly racialized here, as Rihani directs the brunt of wartime nativism toward the Mestizo laborer. Insofar as it traverses an East-West and North-South

geographical imaginary, *Letters to Uncle Sam* helps us to situate the Syrian immigration in an American hemispheric context.

In these letters, Rihani faces the considerable challenge of transforming himself from an adoptive child into a native son. The distance he must traverse in order to effect this transformation becomes apparent on his journey from Spain when two official checkpoints give him pause. The first is at a port in France where an officer points out that Rihani is not a “native American,” a charge he circumvents by producing “the Certificate of my Adoption,” as he puts it (*LS*, 14). The second involves the inspection of Rihani’s ship at sea by an officer of the U.S. navy, presenting a different kind of barrier:

The officer, a fine specimen of your native children, Uncle—a ruddy-cheeked, blue-eyed, raw-boned, chin-in-the-air lad of not more than twenty five,—made me regret for a moment that my father had not emigrated sooner than he did and adventured as I did with one of your native daughters. I might have been born under the flag then and with a countenance that no German spy or French official could mistake.

But the hand of Fate, which shapes the destinies of individuals as well as of nations—No, no: this savors of a homily. I will cut the-hand-of-fate-motive then. Brother or no brother, my heart thrilled with joy, swelled with pride, when he boarded our ship, your young officer Boy, with a pistol in his belt, silent, erect, sculptural, firm of step and gesture, a credit to the authority he represents. In silence he was received by the passengers and officers of the boat, in silence he proceeded to discharge his duty, in silence he exchanged with the captain a farewell salute. It was one of those intense, dramatic moments when the human emotions well and overflow, drowning the faculty of human speech. We did not cheer your brave boys, Uncle, although many of us their brothers were on board. But we remain on deck watching from the stern your flotilla steam away, half-concealed in the clouds of its own making, until it disappeared completely beyond the horizon, carrying with it flutterings and silent vales of our hearts, pent-up, palpitating with a mixed sentiment of sadness and joy. (*LS*, 14-15)

This scene dramatizes Rihani’s identification across the immense distance that separates him from the soldier. The soldier is unmistakably racialized as white. It is a desire for the latter’s “countenance” that provokes Rihani to imagine a different origin for himself: he wishes to be born the child of his immigrant father and a “native” daughter, to be recognizable to other nations as being properly under the American flag. Rihani imagines his own birth much as he imagines Khalid’s birth from the loins of an American mother, producing a hybrid figure who would nonetheless have a recognizably “native” face—who would, in other words, be undeniably white. This desire for a majoritarian identity racialized as white is the quintessence of brown character. It is an impossible desire: an asymptotic approach to whiteness that is written into the very grammar of this passage. The passengers must watch, speechless, as the vision of the soldier recedes in a cloud into the distance, leaving them unable to voice their mixed identifications that seem as much to be occasioned by war as by the unbridgeable gap between them and the soldier. Rihani must “remain on deck,” locked in the present tense of his encounter, unable to venture forward as his desire demands.

The figure of the Mestizo functions in *Letters to Uncle Sam* as a foil against which Syrian whiteness can show itself to advantage. We meet the “Mestizo laborer” in the form of a poem that

introduces Rihani's travels to Mexico (*LS*, 30). Written in loose iambic pentameter in rhymed couplets, the poem is a startling rhythmic incursion into the letter, satirizing revolutionary indigenous labor as an indolent people, fallen from the heights of the ancient Mayan civilization of the Yucatán peninsula:

They're sovereigns of their time and paja hut.
A people whose coffee-colored sandaled feet,
Around the park or down the sandy street
Of lubberland, mock at the ferocious sun,
When you or I would to the shower run.
And they wear life as though a garment new
And work when they have nothing else to do,
Or when they're bribed or bullied.

...

But now alas, the children of Chac Mul
And Kukulcan and Itza drivel and drool
About equality and social creeds
And all the things that honest labor needs,
The while they doze beneath the mango tree,
Or swing in fish-net hammocks listlessly,
Or dance the vacheria in the street,
Or teach their precious parrots to repeat
The Cucaracha. (*LS*, 27-8)

Rihani deems this ostensible digression to be “of vital interest” to Uncle Sam, deciding to “emphasize it both in verse and prose” (*LS*, 29). In part, this is because the Mexican Revolution poses an immediate threat to the wartime supply of hemp, for the workers “acclaim / The right to set the henequen aflame / In the sacred name of labor” (*LS*, 28). Rihani also emphasizes that the “laborer here” is “an I.W.W. in one sense, a Bolshiviki in another” (*LS*, 29).

The poem, and its prose complement, take up the rhetoric of popular nativism that would have been all too familiar to Uncle Sam, concerned as the United States was at this juncture with suppressing radicalism, deporting leftist immigrants, and repressing the I.W.W. and its members, partly for their opposition to the war.⁵⁷ These associations might well have been shaped by the Bisbee deportations of 1917 in which striking workers in Arizona, some of them Mexican, were deported along with I.W.W. organizers and labor-sympathizers to New Mexico and lodged in a tent colony originally intended for Mexican refugees coming across the border.⁵⁸ Rihani is careful to inform Uncle Sam that *his* newfound patriotism is by no means compatible with “the I.W.W. or the pacifists or any wind-suckers-on-general-principles-league” (*LS*, 12). Given that mere belief in socialism, not to mention membership in the I.W.W., was a deportable offense and barrier to naturalization, it makes sense that Rihani would want to position himself beyond such associations. The I.W.W.'s denouncement of the capitalist militarism of the war would also have been at odds with Rihani's interest in a partnership between Syria and Uncle Sam.

After this poetical detour, Rihani turns to his dealings with Mexican Syrians, assuring the reader that “their commercial spirit is immune to Bolshivikism or socialism of any color or shade”

(*LS*, 34). This statement not only heightens Rihani's racialization of the Bolshevik or socialist as Mestizo, but also distances the Syrians from these associations. They are presented by Rihani as the descendants of Phoenician traders whose wealth "goes to the American manufacturer and the American merchant" or "is safely deposited in U.S.A. banks"—a partnership that harks back to Khalid's elaborate Phoenicianism (*LS*, 34). Rihani situates Syrians in a space quite apart from that of the Mestizo laborer. He is conveyed to this space after his arrival by two friends who take him to the house of a well-to-do Syrian "Madame" for a meeting, where he is immediately invited to "shake off my dust," as he puts it (*LS*, 38). We are reminded of the "coffee-colored sandaled feet" of the laborers who lounge and conduct their ostensible lack of business out in the streets. For the more wealthy Syrians, "dust" is something to be left at the door. They are arrayed around a banquet in a "sumptuously, but somewhat incongruously, furnished home" with the "whole set" of "Persian rugs and Japanese screens and Valenciennes curtains—and common prints in elaborate frames to boot," clearly the trappings of an itinerant commercial class (*LS*, 38).

In no sense does Rihani portray the Syrians as Mexican, for even their capital investments are relayed by him to the United States. Mexico functions merely as a stage for the working out of the complications of Allied politics, Rihani's ultimate goal being the convergence of Syrian interests with those of Uncle Sam. In his words, "here is Syria working for Uncle Sam, Uncle Sam working for France and France working for Syria" (*LS*, 46). The relationship between Syria and Uncle Sam seems ultimately to depend on the sumptuous incongruence of the Syrians in Mexico, on their distance from the dirt-bound Mestizo laborer. While the "coffee-colored" Mestizo is indelibly racialized, further marked by his Bolshevism, Rihani shows himself able to dust off these unpalatable associations in a move that recalls Rihbany's sartorial construction of race. All the while Rihani must ensure that the Syrian and his wealth are "safely deposited" within the United States.

Despite Rihani's best efforts to the contrary, Syrians were not in fact dissociated from these borderland dynamics. Many disguised themselves as Mexican and entered into the United States by way of the Southern border in order to avoid stringent inspections at Ellis Island.⁵⁹ They availed themselves of the fungibility of the racial logics of the day, which obfuscated Syrian and Mexican immigrants. It is precisely this fungibility that Rihani wants to preclude in *Letters to Uncle Sam*. He characterizes the Mexican as the member of an alien race, rendering the Syrian all the more American and white. Miscegenation has a role in all this, as Rihani's shipboard reverie suggests, subtended by the juridical flexibility around Syrian intermarriage (which was not explicitly prohibited by anti-miscegenation laws).⁶⁰ For Rihani, and Rihbany before him, miscegenation promises the birth of brown character, racialized as white.

As I point out above, despite Rihani's efforts to sharpen the contrast between the Syrian and Mexican, he must "remain on deck," limited by his asymptotic approach to whiteness as he watches the figure of the sailor drift away in a presumably white cloud. This impossible desire registers formally throughout these letters, which are relayed in a delightfully wry and self-interruptive voice. This voice emerges in the shipboard passage itself when Rihani cuts himself short, perceiving that his rhetoric is too ornate, that it unduly "savors of a homily." He identifies this as a foreign proclivity from the outset: "Please overlook my rarities of speech, dear Uncle, or my slang," he writes, "for I am a foreigner to your native tongue" (*LS*, 14). He must transform what begins as the "native gibberish" of his immediate response to U.S. entry into war into the legible script of the majority-identified minority character (*LS*, 12). He attempts to do so by dramatizing a formal trial of sorts in which a panel of legalistic voices interrupts the letter and questions Rihani's newfound patriotism,

scrutinizing the evidence he presents on his behalf. “We object to this clap-trap of rhetoric, your Honor, and we move to have it struck out,” the panel interjects, as though putting the very form of Rihani’s self-presentation on trial. The panelists command Rihani to “tell his story direct . . . stick to the facts” and not to “exceed the limits of a clear and concise statement,” attempting to bring him down to an officially sanctioned script (*LS*, 17).

What seems to be at stake here is Rihani’s penchant for generalization, his tendency, as aboard the ship, to speak for more than just himself. Can Rihani, like the soldier, claim to represent the United States? Can the “individual,” in Rihbany’s parlance, become a “type”? The verdict of the formal trial is ultimately inconclusive. “We waive our objection,” the panel says, with Rihani proceeding as though they have *waived* their objection. Whether intentional or mistaken, this confusion of homophones closes the trial with a futile gesture, as though pronouncing an uncertain verdict upon the production of brown character itself.

In the end, Rihani succeeds in organizing a Syrian League whose “principle object is ‘to seek through France and her Allies the liberation of Syria from Turkish rule and to support and promote among the Syrians of Mexico the sacred cause of the Allied Powers’” (*LS*, 45). He emerges as a diplomatic successor to Khalid, a “citizen of two worlds,” who is able to effect the convergence of Syrian and American interests in the arena of the war. His efforts have an unexpected consequence that prevents him from sharing in the future of the Syrians in Mexico. For the adoptive son is forced to return to the fold by the Mexican state which asserts its neutrality in the war by deporting Rihani, along with pro-German agitators under Article 33 of the constitution, “applied principally against a persona non grata, who is otherwise called extranjero pernicioso” (*LS*, 44). This deportation makes official, at least from the perspective of the Mexican government, Rihani’s status as an American. If he is alien to Mexico, he belongs all the more dearly to the United States at this juncture in the war. The closing of the text clarifies this newfound intimacy: “Mexico is Mexico, dear Uncle, whatever our I.W.W. scribes and OUR extranjeros perniciosos say to the contrary” (*LS*, 46). This statement illuminates the purpose of Rihani’s anti-labor digressions. In disidentifying himself with the labor movement in Mexico, he is able to identify with U.S. nativism and to declaim the I.W.W. scribe as “OUR” alien element, boldly including himself within the purview of the first-person plural possessive. Just as the I.W.W. scribe’s radicalism renders him deportable from the United States, patriotism renders Rihani deportable *to* the United States. In an assertion that recalls Rihbany’s Pilgrim’s pride, Rihani’s nativism serves to secure his membership in Uncle Sam’s family.

We are not, however, treated to the triumphal return of the “native” son. For Rihani has had to embark on this journey in secret, after his attempts to serve through official channels fail. The adoptive son must find his own means to serve the nation; in Rihani’s words, “if you want to do your country a service, don’t wait for official sanction” (*LS*, 26). Rihani’s reception in the United States is uncertain at best, for he initially embarks upon his journey without the blessing of Uncle Sam. *Letters to Uncle Sam*, the only document that can attest to his patriotic service, to his elaborate production of brown character, would itself go unpublished. Try as he might to become a “recognized member” of Uncle Sam’s “esteemed household,” this recognition is not forthcoming within or without the text.

Nearing the East

Rihani and Rihbany wrote in the context of a complex history of mediations between Syria and the United States. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the Holy Land, encompassing parts of Ottoman Syria, became increasingly open to a range of American travelers, including tourists, scholars, missionaries, and diplomats. The majority were Protestant Christians who sought the origins of their religion, feeling themselves, as in one Episcopal bishop's 1874 account, to be "at home" in this distant land to which they had come, guided by their faith.⁶¹ Hilton Obenzinger shows how they were able "to experience an exegetical landscape at the mythic core of Anglo-America's understanding of its own covenantal mission as a New Israel" shaped by a sense of "typological destiny and millennialist restoration."⁶² The biblical geography of the Holy Land was proximate and somehow approachable by an Anglo-American Protestantism that sought its birthplace on this distant horizon.

The "Orient" became a full-fledged attraction at the turn of the century with the rise of a "Commodity Orientalism," in Melani McAlister's words, that "symbolized a break from nineteenth-century Protestant piety," arraying spectacles of the near and far East for Western consumption that ranged from elaborate store displays of Turkish harems to popular dramatizations of desert adventures involving Arab sheiks and Western women.⁶³ A new spiritualism infused with "Oriental" religion arose in this new market, inaugurated by the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893. At the same time, Protestantism was not far behind in reaching an entente with consumerism, refashioning itself as "a gilded religion for a gilded age," in the words of Jackson Lears.⁶⁴ The Presbyterian owner of the Wanamaker department store in New York saw no contradiction in hosting a spectacular "Garden of Allah" fashion show in 1912, the year after the publication of *The Book of Khalid*.⁶⁵

Syrian immigrants doubtless availed themselves of this Orientalist cultural capital. The surest path to upward mobility was taken by the Syrian peddler, who went from door to door selling goods from the Holy Land.⁶⁶ Although *The Book of Khalid* and *A Far Journey* disparage peddling, they ultimately capitalize on a related market in "Oriental" commodities. Having set fire to his peddling box in the course of his "spiritual encointership," Khalid does not hesitate to take advantage of his social status as a "Beduin Boy" in a series of over-zealous sexual exploits that are characteristically satirized by Rihani (*BK*, 90). The popular appeal of this picaresque prophet would be apparent a few years later with the astounding success of Gibran's *The Prophet* (1923), whose protagonist is prefigured by Khalid.

This "titillating Orientalism" does not fully explain Rihbany's appeal, as Evelyn Shakir suggests.⁶⁷ But the genealogy of a prior American Protestant Orientalism, as I understand it, makes his work more legible. More than half of *A Far Journey* is devoted to Syrian life, work, and culture. Rihbany seamlessly interweaves mundane and sacred geographies, beginning the autobiography by evoking the language of Jesus's nativity to characterize his own: friends tender their congratulations "as did the 'Wise Men' of old on their historical visit to Bethlehem," "exceedingly glad, because unto them a child was born, a son was given" (*FJ*, 4). He is able to leave the uncomfortable proximity of the enclave by way of an appeal to the distant horizon of the Holy Land, to ply his old world nativity in order to produce his claim to the new. His return to Syria in the final chapter literally stages the touristic experience of the Protestant pilgrim, positioning him at a remove from the old dispensation. He feels only "such feelings and sentiments as one experiences while turning over the pages of an old picture-book with which one had been familiar in childhood" (*FJ*, 336). Rihbany can rest secure in

the knowledge that he has, in his words, “left my father’s house in far-off Lebanon” with the help of “God, the compassionate Father, and Christ” (*FJ*, 325).

Within this genealogy of American Orientalism, “Orient” and “Occident” are figured in considerably more continuous terms. This continuity is palpable in Rihani’s redoubling of Khalid’s nativity. He issues from a circular genealogy, a structure of “mysterious recurrence” that links ancient Phoenicia to modern America and ultimately to Syria. At first glance, it seems difficult to reconcile Rihbany’s more straightforward Americanism with this reading. But the following excerpt from the preface to *A Far Journey* indicates otherwise:

Yet, in a large sense, the impassable gulf between my Syrian life and my American life is only seeming, and not real. I am conscious of no loss of continuity. Just as manhood *fulfills* rather than *destroys* childhood, so does America’s large, tumultuous life tend to realize the possibilities with which the ancient, mystic, dreamy Orient endowed me. So to Syria, my loving, untutored mother, as to America, my virile, resourceful teacher, I offer my profound and lasting gratitude. (*FJ*, ix)

Rihbany unmistakably rehearses the teleological binaries of Orientalism as Harb points out, insofar as *A Far Journey* “creates a linearity that may enable containment of self-division through a positioning of the self along lines of progress and evolution.”⁶⁸ This Saidian paradigm does not however fully explain the “continuity” Rihbany constructs, the only “seeming” nature of this “impassable gulf.” Rihbany’s suggestion that America “fulfills” Syria relies on a characteristically Puritan typology, mapping the hermeneutical relationship between Old and New Testaments onto the transition from old world to new.⁶⁹ This theological continuity is partly teleological, but it is circular rather than linear, allowing Rihbany to return repeatedly to Syria, not just to diminish his Syrian life in the service of a progressivist vision but to read in his past the prophetic signs of his future in America. It is precisely this circular return that stages the impossibility of teleological regression, culminating in what David Leigh refers to as a “spiral” pilgrimage, “ending where it began, but on a higher level.”⁷⁰

Rihbany and Rihani modify the classic binary logic of Orientalism that must be adapted for the specific case of the United States, as critics have shown.⁷¹ We see the makings of a remarkable literary structure, more circular than binary, not only teleological but also typological, a structure that enables the propinquity of “East” and “West” to be conceived. This Orientalist structure prefigures some of the flexibility of “post-Orientalist” representations that critics have thus far associated with the latter part of the twentieth century, underscoring the role played by the early Syrian immigration in contributing to the vexed contiguity of the Middle East within a U.S. cultural imaginary.⁷²

The Syrian campaign for naturalization would rely on, and reinforce, this Orientalist propinquity. As Sarah Gualtieri has shown, Syrians employed various racial, cultural, and legal logics in the course of this campaign: their Semitic status then classified as “white,” their claim to being a point of origin for Western civilization and Christianity, and the fact that Jewish immigrants were eligible to naturalize. Their Holy Land provenance was central to this argument, suggesting that the denial of Syrian whiteness would effectively mean a denial of the whiteness of Jesus Christ. In a letter to the *New York Times* in 1909, H. E. Halaby pointed out that “Syrians are very proud of their ancestry, and believe that the Caucasian race had its origins in Syria, that they opened the commerce

of the world, and that Christ, our Saviour, was born among them, in which fact the Syrians take high pride.”⁷³ The Syrian American Association writing on behalf of petitioner George Dow in 1913 argued that “the history and position of the Syrians, their connection through all time with the peoples to whom the Jewish and Christian peoples owe their religion, make it inconceivable that the statute could have intended to exclude them.”⁷⁴ In the course of this strategic religious affiliation, Syrians disavowed their relation to Islam. Kalil Bishara’s *The Origin of the Modern Syrian* (1914) appeared amid this controversy in both English and Arabic, but while the Arabic version included the name of Muhammad among a list of Semitic luminaries, the English version did not. Despite the fact that a number of Muslim Syrians came to the United States, the Syrian immigration was largely figured as the outcome of Muslim persecution perpetrated by the “terrible Turk,” vilified in the context of the war.⁷⁵

Syrians ultimately prevailed in their campaign. As one judge argued, “they were so closely related to their neighbors on the European side of the Mediterranean that they should be classed as white.”⁷⁶ Their contiguity with Europe, and Europe’s contiguity with the United States in the national imaginary, ultimately allowed for Syrian naturalization. This was not “the triumph of assimilation,” as Gualtieri cautions, underscoring “the dialecticity of immigrant adaptation.”⁷⁷ Not only would whiteness continue to be tenuous for Syrians, naturalization would by no means diminish a robust tradition of Arab nationalism within the immigrant community.

The title of Bishara’s book suggests that Syrian immigrants were actively engaged in crafting a story of origins that would mediate the “dialecticity” of their position within the United States. The nearness of the East would find its literary expression in Rihani and Rihbany’s work as they shaped the “word America” into the “form of Opportunity,” to use Rihbany’s turn of phrase. *A Far Journey* relies on the convergence of Protestantism and Americanism to establish a continuity between the Holy Land and the United States in service of Rihbany’s brown character. If Rihbany comes to the United States through Syria, Rihani can be said to come to Syria through the United States. Whereas Rihbany is reborn into an extant patrimony, Khalid is pained with the task of birthing the prospect of a revolutionary mutuality between his two motherlands. As the Superman of America, a brown hero incarnate, he cathects around imperialist American exceptionalism in order to advance Syrian anticolonialism that is ultimately transformed into a dream of Arab empire. Rihani is himself quite skeptical of these mad aspirations: he builds their dissolution into the very fragments of the novel’s narrative structure, only to take them up himself in his autobiographical treatise, *Letters to Uncle Sam*.

There is one important feature of these characterizations of mixed identification: they elaborate a series of imagined attachments that reconceive the Syrian as an American “native,” heir to the exceptional promise of America. Nativity is denaturalized in the course of these narratives of immigration. Although Rihani and Rihbany cannot claim the empirical fact of birth in the United States, they nonetheless imagine ways of “going native,” conceiving an American nativity that is subject to the modifications of their immigrant status. Generally understood to refer to one’s birthplace, nativity becomes a creative project that mediates the mixed identifications of brown character. I want to close by briefly considering the implications of this paradoxical discourse of “immigrant nativity,” as I understand it.

Immigrants are precisely *not* native. They are targeted by the nativist who seems to have the most emphatic claim to nativity. Based on its dictionary definitions, this “nativity” might be provisionally understood as a belonging related to birth, kinship, or origins.⁷⁸ As the assonance of

nativity with nativism suggests, this belonging is not just inclusionary but also exclusionary. Some of these meanings are captured by Raymond Williams in his discussion of the term “native” to which he attributes two connotations: the first pertains to what is “innate, natural, or of a place in which one is born,” as in “native land, native country”; the second emerges out of European colonialism, designating “the inferior inhabitants of a place subjected to alien political power or conquest.”⁷⁹ Other critics have gestured toward this “innate” or “natural” nativity without using the term as such, identifying blood relations, primordial genealogies of descent, or autochthonous claims to the soil at the heart of nation formation that are not necessarily coextensive with the political and juridical boundaries of the nation-state. As Priscilla Wald argues, “naturalization” evinces the alchemy of the state: the transformation of the many, if not into one, then at least into an intricate relatedness that hovers uncertainly between kinship and citizenship.⁸⁰ Nativity signifies this overdetermination of naturalization that exceeds the mere conferral of citizenship. Wald and others emphasize that this nativity is in fact producible; the prospect of “going native” theorized by postcolonial studies suggests as much.⁸¹ It might be said to reach a limit in indigeneity: “to go *indigenous* is obviously less plausible than to go native,” as Williams points out.⁸² In effect, the paradox of immigrant nativity stages this production of nativity by immigrants. Because it is perforce a creation, an “alchemy” of the imagination as it were, immigrant nativity is particularly responsive to the methods of literary analysis.

The turn of the century when Rihbany and Rihani immigrated to the United States might well be understood as a crucible of immigrant nativity. Madison Grant’s *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916) was instrumental in synthesizing an ideology of racial nativism, as John Higham describes it, that targeted new immigrants, identifying the United States with the old, primarily Protestant, immigration from northern and western Europe.⁸³ The restrictionist Immigration Act of 1924 epitomized this ideology, mandating the formation of a committee that allocated immigration quotas to countries based on the proportion of the population in 1920 that traced its origins to those countries. Its efforts amounted to what Mae Ngai describes as “the invention of national origins”: the colonial population was designated as “native stock” and all persons entering after 1790 were relegated to the “immigrant stock,” regardless of whether or not they were born in the United States.⁸⁴ This was a racialized construction of nativity that not only divided Europe but also “divided Europe from the non-European world,” as Ngai points out; while Americans and European immigrants were attributed national origins, the “colored races,” including “black, mulatto, Chinese, Japanese, and Indians,” were “imagined as having *no country of origin*. They lay outside the concept of nationality and, therefore, citizenship. They were not even bona fide immigrants.”⁸⁵ At the same time, the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 granted citizenship to Native Americans.

These Acts “participated in a recasting of American citizenship,” Walter Benn Michaels has argued, “changing it from a status that could be achieved through one’s own actions (immigrating, becoming ‘civilized,’ getting ‘naturalized’) to a status that could better be understood as inherited.”⁸⁶ Ngai makes a similar argument, tracing a shift during this period from the cultural nationalism of the late nineteenth century, which had a certain investment in the assimilative potential of the melting pot, to a race-based nationalism which was concerned less with hierarchy than with “hereditarianism” based on a concept of absolute, unassimilable difference.⁸⁷ Even as the colonial American was figured as the original American “native,” the Native American was incorporated into the nation-state, indigeneity coming to buttress the production of immigrant nativity.

In this context, *A Far Journey*, *The Book of Khalid*, and *Letters to Uncle Sam* suggest that an immigrant might be imaginatively reborn as an American “native.” Early Syrian immigrant literature claims a particular inheritance, to use the terms of Michaels’s and Ngai’s analysis, challenging the dichotomous “hereditarianism” of this period with its production of nativity. As the frontispiece of *A Far Journey* demonstrates, the act of writing is itself a rite of passage that has its historical uses. “Going native,” even nativist, Rihbany and Rihani sought for a time to enjoin the United States to the anticolonial struggle of a burgeoning foreign state. Iterative and interruptive, rather than definitively transformative, their writings imagine brown characters who cement the paradox of alienage and nativity while simultaneously undermining this effort. Rihbany’s insistent iteration of his Pilgrim lineage, the transcendental sub-transcendentalism of Rihani’s Superman, and the unsanctioned allegiance of Uncle Sam’s adoptive son, all manifest this vexed desire—to realize Arab Americanism out of a set of not incompatible Arab and American identifications.

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1. Abraham Mitrie Rihbany, *A Far Journey: An Autobiography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), 154, 176, 230 (hereafter cited in text as *FJ*).
 2. Kemal H. Karpat, “The Ottoman Emigration to America, 1860-1914,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17, no. 2 (May 1985): 185.
 3. Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 12.
 4. For an overview of the push factors see Karpat, “The Ottoman Emigration,” 176-80.
 5. Sarah Gualtieri, “Gendering the Chain Migration Thesis: Women and Syrian Transatlantic Migration, 1878-1924,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 24, no. 1 (2004): 68.
 6. Naff, *Becoming American*, 85; Sarah M. A. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 79.
 7. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 45-6; see also Naff, *Becoming American*, 117.
 8. Naff, *Becoming American*, 252.
 9. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 47.
 10. Naff, *Becoming American*, 249-251, 108-9, 252-3, 117. Naff cites the 1929 census in what appears to be an error; see Lisa Suhair Majaj, “Arab-Americans and the Meanings of Race,” in *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature*, ed. Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 333n8. Majaj provides a useful overview of the “liminality” of Arab American racialization.
 11. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 77.
 12. Naff, *Becoming American*, 259.
 13. For a useful overview of the Syrian racial prerequisite cases, see appendix A of Ian Haney López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*, 10th anniversary ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2006).
 14. López, *White by Law*, 49-50.
 15. For more on how Syrians were able to “fashion themselves as among those thought to be white in the understanding

of the common man,” see Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 3. Despite this success, Syrians were targeted as “the spawn of the Phoenician curse”; pathologized as carriers of disease; singled out as the “trash of the Mediterranean,” unfit for immigration; and even lynched in Jim Crow South (Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 54, 110, 113). For accounts by individual Syrians attesting to the hostility they faced, see Naff, *Becoming American*, 247-59.

16. See Suheil Bushrui and Joe Jenkins, *Kahlil Gibran: Man and Poet* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 190. One source suggests that the group was in fact formed in 1916, with the more politicized aim to unionize Arab immigrant writers (“al-Rabitah al-Qalamiyah,” Al-Funūn, accessed April 28, 2012, <http://www.al-funun.org/penbond/index.html>).

17. Mikhail Naimy, *Kahlil Gibran: A Biography* (London: Quartet Books, 1988), 200, 157.

18. Naff, *Becoming American*, 322; Naimy, *Kahlil Gibran*, 251.

19. Naff, *Becoming American*, 34-6.

20. For a useful overview of these debates in the *mahjar*, see Chapter 3 of Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*.

21. Gregory Orfalea and Sharif Elmusa, eds. *Grape Leaves: A Century of Arab American Poetry* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 67, 47.

22. Orfalea and Elmusa, *Grape Leaves*, xxi. The issue contents are available at Al-Funūn, “Majallat al-Funūn: al-Funūn’s October 1916 Special Edition,” accessed April 28, 2012, <http://www.al-funun.org/al-funun/index.html>.

23. Bushrui and Jenkins, *Kahlil Gibran*, 118, 135, 140, 158.

24. Naff, *Becoming American*, 32. Naff points out that while the Maronites of Mount Lebanon welcomed the French, the more nationalistic, non-Catholic Syrians, seeking to advance an independent Arab nation, deplored their rule. These divisions extended to the immigrant community in the United States, which split over “Syrian-American” versus “Lebanese-American” affiliations (310).

25. Abraham Mitrie Rihbany, *Militant America and Jesus Christ* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1917); Abraham Mitrie Rihbany, *America Save the Near East* (Boston: Beacon, 1918), x, 4.

26. Abraham Mitrie Rihbany, *Wise Men from the East and from the West* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1922), 247.

27. For more on Rihani’s life and work, see generally Nathan C. Funk and Betty J. Sitka, eds. *Ameen Rihani: Bridging East and West* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004); and Naji Oueijan et al., eds. *Kahlil Gibran and Ameen Rihani: Prophets of Lebanese-American Literature* (Louaize, Lebanon: Notre Dame University Press, 1999). Rihbany has yet to receive sustained critical attention.

28. See Nuwar Mawlawi Diab, “Ameen Rihani’s Vision of Globalization: Matrimony, Not Hegemony,” in *Ameen Rihani: Bridging East and West*, ed. Nathan C. Funk and Betty J. Sitka (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004), 98.

29. Geoffrey P. Nash, “Rihani and Carlyle on Revolution and Modernity,” in *Ameen Rihani: Bridging East and West*, ed. Nathan C. Funk and Betty J. Sitka (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004) 51. For more on these shifts in Rihani’s perspective over the course of his career, see generally Geoffrey P. Nash, *The Arab Writer in English: Arab Themes in a Metropolitan Language, 1908-1958* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1998).

30. See generally Nouri Gana, “Introduction: Race, Islam, and the Task of Muslim and Arab American Writing,” *PMLA* 123, no. 5 (October 2008): 1573-1580; Amal Talaat Abdelrazek, *Contemporary Arab American Women Writers: Hyphenated Identities and Border Crossings* (Youngstown, NY: Cambria Press, 2007); Steven Salaita, *Arab American Literary Fictions, Cultures, and Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); and Salah D. Hassan and Marcy Jane Knopf-Newman, “Introduction,” *MELUS* 31, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 3-13. For a hemispheric conception of Arab American literature, see Ottmar Ette and Friederike Pannewick, eds. *ArabAmericas: Literary Entanglements of the American*

Hemisphere and the Arab World (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2006); and Darcy A. Zabel, ed. *Arabs in the Americas: Interdisciplinary Essays on the Arab Diaspora* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006). On Arab literature in the context of a broader Anglophone Arab canon, see Layla Al Maleh, ed. *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009). This concerted effort was preceded by a few scattered attempts to understand Arab American literature prior to September 11, including Evelyn Shakir, "Arab-American Literature," in *New Immigrant Literatures in the United States: A Sourcebook to our Multicultural Literary Heritage*, ed. Alpana Sharma Knippling (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1996).

31. Apamea Consulting and Publishing Services, "The Syrian Christ: Overview," October 31, 2003, <http://02db755.netsolhost.com/overview.html>.

32. Project Khalid, "The 100th Anniversary of the First Arab-American Novel," accessed April 28, 2012, <http://projectkhalid.org/>.

33. Gana, "Introduction," 1580.

34. Wail S. Hassan, "The Rise of Arab-American Literature: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in the Work of Ameen Rihani," *American Literary History* 20, no. 1-2 (Spring/Summer 2008): 254, 271.

35. Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 136.

36. Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 214. On the early prominence of Congregationalism in colonial America, see Winthrop S. Hudson, *American Protestantism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 20, 51.

37. On the mediation of "the American version of deliverance" through "a real geographical place," see Patricia Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 26.

38. Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1996), 187, 76. Note that Riis uses the term "Street Arab" to refer generally to homeless children.

39. Sirène Harb, "Orientalism and the Construction of American Identity in Abraham Mitrie Rihbany's *A Far Journey*," *MELUS* 33, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 136.

40. Ameen F. Rihani, *The Book of Khalid*, 6th ed. (Beirut, Lebanon: Librairie du Liban, 2000), 32 (hereafter cited in text as *BK*).

41. Ameen Rihani, *Excerpts from Ar-Rihaniyat* (Louaize, Lebanon: Notre Dame University Press, 1998), 5.

42. Nathan C. Funk, "East and West Can Meet," in *Kahlil Gibran and Ameen Rihani: Prophets of Lebanese-American Literature*, ed. Naji Oueijan et al. (Louaize, Lebanon: Notre Dame University Press, 1999), 178.

43. Hassan, "The Rise of Arab-American Literature," 260.

44. See generally Funk and Sitka, *Ameen Rihani: Bridging East and West*. Hassan points out that much of these criticism remains trapped within the Orientalist binaries of "East" and "West" even as it looks to Rihani to transcend them (Hassan, "The Rise of Arab-American Literature," 273-4n19).

45. Halim Barakat, "Ameen Rihani: Daring to Dream," in *Ameen Rihani: Bridging East and West*, ed. Nathan C. Funk and Betty J. Sitka (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004), 102.

46. For more on Rihani's relation to Whitman, see Terri DeYoung, "The Search for Peace and East-West Reconciliation in Rihani's Prose Poetry," in *Ameen Rihani: Bridging East and West*, ed. Nathan C. Funk and Betty J. Sitka (Lanham,

MD: University Press of America, 2004), 25-34.

47. David Morse, *American Romanticism* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1987), 119.
48. For an overview of these debates, see generally Tim Prchal and Tony Trigilio, eds. *Visions and Divisions: American Immigration Literature, 1870-1930* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008).
49. Ameen Rihani, *The Path of Vision: Essays of East and West* (Beirut, Lebanon: The Rihani House, 1970), 124.
50. Tammany Hall was notorious for helping naturalize immigrants, often through illegal means, in order to secure partisan votes; see, for instance, Oliver E. Allen, *The Tiger: The Rise and Fall of Tammany Hall* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1993), 103-4.
51. Randolph Bourne, "Trans-National America," *Atlantic Monthly* 118 (July 1916): 96, 93, 95.
52. Rihani, *The Path of Vision*, 124.
53. On Columbia as a figure for expansionism, see Malini Johar Schueller, *U.S. Orientalisms: Race, Nation, and Gender in Literature, 1790-1890* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 12.
54. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 23.
55. See generally M. Şükrü Hanioglu, "Turkism and the Young Turks, 1889-1908," in *Turkey Beyond Nationalism: Towards Post-Nationalist Identities*, ed. Hans-Lukas Kieser (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 3-19.
56. Ameen F. Rihani, *Letters to Uncle Sam* (Washington, DC: Platform International, 2001), 12 (hereafter cited in text as *LS*).
57. For an overview of anti-radical nativism during this period, see generally John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004). For a more detailed account of the suppression of alien radicalism leading up to and during the war years, see generally William Preston, *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1994).
58. Philip S. Foner, *Labor and World War I, 1914-1918*, vol. VII, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1987), 271-5.
59. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 55. In 1906, the Department of Commerce and Labor conducted an undercover investigation into crossings of the U.S.-Mexican border by Syrian immigrants (Akram Fouad Khater, "Becoming 'Syrian' in America: A Global Geography of Ethnicity and Nation," *Diaspora* 14, no. 2/3 (2005): 316).
60. Anti-miscegenation laws, historically prohibited relationships between blacks and whites, targeted primarily "Indians," "Mongolians," including Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans, "Hindus/Asiatic Indians" or South Asians, and "Malays" or Filipinos (Susan Koshy, *Sexual Naturalization: Asian Americans and Miscegenation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 3. For a comprehensive overview of miscegenation laws by state, see generally Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). It seems that Syrians were not explicitly included within the purview of these laws, but it is difficult to say with any certainty whether or not they were affected by them.
61. Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, & U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*, Updated ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 14.
62. Hilton Obenzinger, *American Palestine: Melville, Twain, and the Holy Land Mania* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 3.
63. McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 22.

64. T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 193.
65. William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 191, 110.
66. For more on pack peddling, see Chapter 4 of Naff, *Becoming American*.
67. Evelyn Shakir, "Mother's Milk: Women in Arab-American Autobiography," *MELUS* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1988): 43.
68. Harb, "Orientalism and the Construction of American Identity," 143.
69. On Puritan typology, see Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 93.
70. David J. Leigh, *Circuitous Journeys: Modern Spiritual Autobiography* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 5, 4.
71. See Josephine Nock-Hee Park, *Apparitions of Asia: Modernist Form and Asian American Poetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 6; Colleen Lye, *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 10; Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 10-11; Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 7; McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 11-12; and Schueller, *U.S. Orientalisms*, 9.
72. McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 40. For a related argument about Cold War representations of Asia and the Pacific, see Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 15.
73. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 3-4.
74. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 67-68. On similar arguments in South African and Australian contexts, see Khater, "Becoming 'Syrian' in America," 319-21.
75. For arguments against this "persecution thesis," see Karpat, "The Ottoman Emigration," 178-9; Naff, *Becoming American*, 86-89; and Khater, "Becoming 'Syrian' in America," 303. This anti-Muslim bias was characteristic of a number of early Syrian immigrant writings, including, in addition to Rihbany's autobiography, George Haddad's *Mt. Lebanon to Vermont* (1916), Philip Hitti's *Syrians in America* (1924), Salom Rizk's *Syrian Yankee* (1943), and Michael Shadid's *Crusading Doctor* (1956) (Karpat, "The Ottoman Emigration," 207n14; Majaj, "Arab-Americans and the Meanings of Race," 334n27).
76. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 74.
77. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 156.
78. See *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "nativity," http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/00321501?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=nativity&first=1&max_to_show=10.
79. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Revised ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 215.
80. Priscilla Wald, "Naturalization," in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, ed. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 173-174. See also Timothy Brennan, "The National Longing for Form," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990); and Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). For Brennan, the nation "refers both to the modern nation-state and to something more ancient and nebulous—the 'natio'—a local community,

domicile, family, condition of belonging” (45). Appadurai points to the uneasy relationship between the modern nation-state and a set of naturalized “primordia” encompassing “blood, kinship, race, and soil” (162, 161).

81. See, for instance, Bill Ashcroft et al., *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, Second ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 106.

82. Williams, *Keywords*, 215. Although indigeneity is a contested term, it is associated with a specific history of dispossession by colonial occupation and disenfranchisement by the modern nation-state; see, for instance, James Clifford, “Indigenous Articulations,” *Contemporary Pacific* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 472.

83. Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 157.

84. Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 36, 26.

85. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 27.

86. Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 32.

87. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 23-5.

Chapter 2

COLUMBUS'S MISTAKE

Dhan Gopal Mukerji and Dalip Singh Saund Rediscover America

Among the pages of a 1909 edition of *Out West*, there is a fascinating description of “The Picturesque Immigrant from India’s Coral Strand” by Saint Nihal Singh:

He comes clad in countless curious styles. Yards upon yards of cotton, calico or silk are swathed about the head of one, forming a turban, cone-shaped or round like a button-mushroom, with a wave or point directly in the middle of the forehead or to the right or left, as variable as the styles of American women’s pompadours—some with a long end hanging down from the back, gracefully and somewhat coquettishly dangling over one shoulder; others with the end securely tucked into the twisted rolls that twine round and round the head. A scarlet Turkish fez tops the head of another, while a third wears an ordinary cap or hat, and the fourth goes about bare-headed.

A smart English military uniform, with the front plastered over with metal medals, a voluminous turban and a bristling beard, distinguish the tall, lanky Sikh soldier who has served in King Edward’s army in India and elsewhere. The man with the fez is usually a Mahometan and is apt to wear a long-flowing coat reaching almost to his ankles and leaving partly visible his pajamas, which fit tightly around his shins. He is sockless, and the toes of his slipper-like shoes curve fantastically over the top of his feet. The man with the Western cap wears clothes of pseudo-Occidental style, which he fondly believes to be up-to-date, measured by Western standards; but the sleeves invariably are too short and end nearer the elbow than the wrist, while the coat and nether garments are tight where they should be loose, and baggy where they should be tight. As a rule, the clothes are dilapidated in appearance and frequently second-hand; and the whole combination is grotesque except in the eyes of the newcomer himself. These specimens of the Hindoo genus homo are almost invariably workingmen or peasant-laborers.

The bare-headed Hindoo is without a coat. A longish shirt, resembling an artist’s apron, reaches nearly to his ankles. He wears long stockings like a woman’s and rope-soled half-shoes. Circling his left shoulder and waist like a marshal’s sash, is a *daupata*, a strip of cotton cloth, a handsomely-embroidered piece of silk or a long, soft shawl. In many cases, instead of the long shirt, the man drapes around his legs and trunk a sheet of cotton or silk known as a *dhoti*. Again, the *dhoti* is worn in combination with the shirt, the trunk covered by the shirt, reaching just below the thigh and the *dhoti* loosely wound around the legs. This type of Hindoo is usually a religious missionary intent on spreading his cult on the Western hemisphere.

Some there are in the group straggling across the gang-plank with whose dress even the most fastidious American could find no fault. Their clothes are of the latest approved style in cut, color and material. The well-dressed East-Indians are merchants, students, or men of means who are traveling merely for the sake of pleasure.¹

The imbalance here is striking. Upon the subject of the “countless curious styles” of the immigration from the Indian continent, Singh is meticulous. But every other speculation proceeds out of this painstaking commentary. Profession, religion, reasons for immigration—are all a function of the attire of these immigrants. This is the “East” on offer for Orientalist Western scrutiny. In the breezy manner of Abraham Rihbany’s self-presentation in *A Far Journey*, the only mode of difference Singh acknowledges is sartorial.

Indeed, there is significant continuity between the near or middle East and the far East. Globally, the fate of British India was increasingly linked to that of the Middle East, which took on strategic importance as Britain sought to consolidate its imperial power in the region with the deterioration of the Ottoman empire.² In the United States, both Syrians and Indians were classified by the racial science of the period as Caucasian. However, the courts shaped the fortunes of these immigrants very differently: whereas Syrians were able to claim juridical whiteness, a 1923 Supreme Court decision in *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* found “Hindus” to be non-white and therefore ineligible to naturalization. The Indian immigration would overlap with a different genealogy of “Asiatic” immigration, namely that of Chinese and Japanese exclusion in the Pacific Northwest, consolidated in the Asiatic Barred Zone in 1917 (from which Syria was notably absent). Following the 1907 Bellingham riots, the San Francisco Japanese and Korean Exclusion League changed its name to the Asiatic Exclusion League in order to target the new “Hindu Invasion.”³ According to a 1910 article, it was no longer “a question of the yellow and the white, but of the Oriental and the Occidental” since the “threatening inundation of Hindoos over the Pacific Coast.”⁴

A related yet distinct idea of the “East” emerges here, when compared with the Syrian examples already treated. I want to take these similarities and differences as a point of departure as I excavate the mixed identifications of immigrants from British India. My focus is on the work of two writers: Dhan Gopal Mukerji and Dalip Singh Saund. Both were part of an immigration that fell in between “old” and “new” Indian diasporic settlements, the former involving classic capitalist indenture and the latter the dislocations of late capitalism.⁵ Entrants to the United States numbered just over 10,000 from 1900 to 1960.⁶ This group included migrant workers and farmers (mostly from the Punjab region in northwest India) who came primarily to the West coast, and much smaller numbers of Indian students and political exiles who settled in major cities on the East and West coast, establishing centers of anticolonial organizing there.⁷ Generally described as “Hindu,” a majority of these immigrants were in fact Sikhs, with some Muslims and even fewer Hindus among them.⁸ Marriages between Punjabis and Mexicans were quite common, beginning in Texas and extending to Imperial Valley, with families ultimately moving northward along routes of migratory labor.⁹

For the West Coast nativist, this “picturesque” parade was a parade of undesirables. Their dress made these immigrants an easy target: they were denounced as “ragheads” or a “Tide of Turbans.”¹⁰ Many passed as black, Italian, Mexican, or Portuguese, doffing their turbans and taking advantage of this limited sartorial flexibility.¹¹ Of course, the taking off or putting on of outerwear did not deflect nativist harangue. For the nativist, difference was an indelible feature of skin. Indian immigrants were often explicitly identified as “brown” during this period. Lumber mill workers driven out of Bellingham in 1907 crossed into Canada only to be greeted by a “bumper anti-brownie parade,” according to a local newspaper account.¹² One California Senator told reporters in 1907 that he was resolved “to protect the Pacific coast from the brown horde.”¹³ The most common categorization applied to Punjabi Mexicans and their descendants on marriage, birth, and death

certificates was “brown.”¹⁴ At times, the immigrants themselves claimed this identification: “the white man has two standards, one for his own use and the other for the man with the brown skin,” one Sikh commented.¹⁵

This “brown skin” was not categorizable in its own right, but represented the limit of classification. As one landlord remarked in a 1924 interview, “the Hindu resembles us except that he is black—and we are shocked to see a black white man.”¹⁶ The Indian immigrant confounded dichotomies of racialization in the United States. He represented a paradoxical combination of “black” skin and “white” features. There was no adequate lexicon for this kind of difference. The courts took on this challenge of racial classification, finding Indians to be white for the purposes of naturalization in 1910, 1913, 1919, and 1920, but not in 1909, 1917, or 1923 and thereafter.¹⁷ Over the course of the twentieth century, immigration from the Indian subcontinent would be classified variously as “Other,” “Hindu,” “White,” “Asian Indian,” and “Asian or Pacific Islander.”¹⁸ Vijay Prashad’s *The Karma of Brown Folk* (2001) registers the intermediate situation of this group without explicitly theorizing it, exploring South Asian complicity with the myth of model minority deployed against African Americans.

A handful of writers immigrated during this time, including Ved Mehta, Santha Rama Rau, and Krishnalal Shridharani (in addition to Mukerji and Saund).¹⁹ These writers are only beginning to receive attention within the field of South Asian American studies, itself a latecomer to ethnic studies.²⁰ I focus in this chapter on the production of brown character in Mukerji’s *Caste and Outcast* (1923) and Saund’s *Congressman from India* (1960), both of which offer rich autobiographical characterizations of majority-identified minority desire. I begin with Mukerji’s *Caste and Outcast*, which bridges the Orientalist divide of “East” and “West” with a climactic vision of nativity, describing America as a “seed continent” that will bear the fruit of many nations. The next section contrasts Mukerji’s prophetic vision with that of Ameen Rihani in *The Book of Khalid* (1911), showing how their work was shaped comparably (yet distinctly) by the domestic racialization of Syrians and Indians and their situation in a global geopolitical context. The challenge here is to read synchronically, across the contemporaneous situation of Mukerji and Rihani, while at the same time reading diachronically from Mukerji to Saund.

I then turn to Saund’s *Congressman from India*, published almost forty years after Mukerji’s autobiography. The conferral of naturalization rights upon Indian immigrants in 1946 serves as a pivot for this reading. Whereas Mukerji finds himself on the wrong side of an Anglo-American alliance, a conflict that delimits his characterization of mixed identification, Saund gives full expression to majoritarian desire. He assumes the role of brown character as the first Asian American Member of Congress—literal and figurative representative of the American people. I consider his propaganda function in a Cold War context. His brown character obfuscates the black and white inequities of American society: he offers a postracial vision that is too farsighted to see the ongoing polarities of race.

Mukerji’s Seed Continent

Mukerji was born in 1890 under British colonial rule and brought up as a Brahmin in a small village near Calcutta. He came to the United States through Japan in 1909, supporting himself through courses at the University of California, Berkeley before becoming a student at Stanford University. *Caste and Outcast* treats of this period in his life by way of a binary construction. The first

section, “Caste,” details Mukerji’s upbringing, Brahminical customs and family life, his initiation into the priesthood followed by a customary period of pilgrimage and supplication, and his pursuit of studies in Calcutta and Japan. The second section, “Outcast,” describes his schooling at the University of California, Berkeley from 1910 to 1913, the various jobs he held during this time, as well as his encounters with a motley crew of outcasts (as suggested by the title), including anarchists, socialists, nationalists, factory workers, field laborers, Spiritualists, and prostitutes.

Caste and Outcast has generally been read as a factual document of early Indian immigration to the United States.²¹ A recent 2002 edition does much to situate the autobiography as a work of literature in its own right, also offering what is to my knowledge the first scholarly biography of Mukerji’s life. This edition presents *Caste and Outcast* against the grain of immigrant autobiography. In their afterword, Purnima Mankekar and Akhil Gupta show how attachments to place, continuity of the self, or the realization of a teleology, are rendered problematic in a journey “driven by a spiritual restlessness.”²² In a separate essay, Gupta elaborates upon this “tale of wanderlust,” arguing that Mukerji does not undertake “a form of travel motivated by an immediacy of purpose but a pilgrimage with a transcendental and an ultimately elusive goal;” he shows how Mukerji’s belief in transmigration and reincarnation complicates not only the supposed cohesion of a life history, “circumscribed by the boundaries of birth and death,” but also exceeds “the framework of nation-states,” refusing to renounce the old homeland for the assurances of the new.²³

Mankekar and Gupta find the autobiography to be exceptional rather than archetypal. “*Caste and Outcast* is not a conventional ‘ethnic autobiography,’” they write, pointing out the fact that Mukerji “finds community” with a series of “outsiders”: “His interactions with those at the margins of ‘mainstream’ U.S. culture enable him to construct powerful critiques of the workings of power in his ‘host country.’”²⁴ In their view, “Mukerji does not claim an American identity but maintains the position of an Indian in the United States”; the “second half of *Caste and Outcast* reads much more like the unique adventures of an exceptional individual than the story of an archetypal immigrant.”²⁵ Their argument reminds me of Rihbany’s insistence that *his* autobiography, by contrast, be understood as “the story, not of an individual, but of a type”—the “type” that is of the “talented foreigner.”²⁶ Mukerji’s unconventionality is confusing, when contrasted with this account. Because the “exception” *is* the American “type.” By the logic of American exceptionalism, talent is in fact typical. The exceptional immigrant autobiography affirms its own typicality. In this context, the distinction between exception and archetype becomes unsustainable.

Caste and Outcast is indeed a strange rendering of immigrant autobiography, but I am reluctant to read either the text or its author as exceptional. Mukerji’s perspicacious critique of structural power is more ambivalent than it initially seems. It is clear that the outcasts with whom he associates in the second section bear the brunt of state-sanctioned violence and deprivation, but the upshot of this clarity is never revealed. Mukerji does offer “powerful critiques” of structural power, but he never fully identifies with these outcasts. Instead, *Caste and Outcast* stages a disidentification with minoritization, as I will go on to show. All this is followed by a strange epilogue, that seems to undo the work of the entire section preceding, not to mention constitute a stark departure from the hitherto binary construction of the text. For someone who refuses to claim Americanness, who remains tethered to his Indian identity (as Mankekar and Gupta note), Mukerji closes with a remarkable projection of the union of India and America that will eventually correct for Columbus’s mistake—namely, his mistaken identification of the Americas as the Indies. The many formal and conceptual oddities of the text are a feature of its strange historical situation, not the least of which is

its publication in the same year as the *Thind* decision that would find Indian immigrants to be non-white despite the petitioner's claim to Caucasian kinship. The binarism of India and America, and Mukerji's efforts to surmount this binarism, represent the contradictions of this monumental decision. The lineaments of majoritarian identification are visible here, even if brown character is nowhere fully realized.

Mukerji must traverse a vast distance from India to America. This monumental journey is exemplified in a chapter entitled "East and West," which takes it upon itself to shore up their contrast. This chapter begins with a striking image. "There is a gulf between the oriental and the occidental mind: it is as though each were a lighthouse on a separate headland, illuminating the channel on one side and the channel on the other, but leaving in complete darkness the crossing between. This crossing I was about to attempt."²⁷ Indeed, this "gulf" is built into the very form of *Caste and Outcast*, which is divided into two distinct halves.

Japan is depicted as a way-station in the course of this crossing. Having barely begun his studies in textile engineering in Tokyo, Mukerji leaves for the United States, prompted by an encounter with a fellow Indian who has just been there:

He said, "Japan is no country for anybody; if you want to see the civilized use of machinery, go to America." Then he drew an Arabian Nights' picture of the United States. He said, "Anyone who doesn't like America had better freeze up and get out! No son-of-a-gun that is a knocker need apply there!" His language sounded extremely romantic after the Miltonic English to which I had been accustomed, and I felt irresistibly drawn to America. (*CO*, 137)

Mukerji is riveted by the contrast this man represents. He is drawn less by the promise of a more "civilized" industrialism than by the "romantic" tenor of this man's language, its exciting incongruity with his own presumably staid idiom. "America" is the stuff of Arabian fable, holding out the thrilling promise of Scheherazade's unfinished tale. Japan is "still an oriental country," Mukerji points out elsewhere, looking "to reach a place where I could keep none of my traditions" (*CO*, 137). When he reaches the West coast, his own language becomes all the more impoverished. He quotes "Miltonic English" to the porter who unceremoniously tosses his bags down from the ship's deck to the wharf ("Him the Almighty Power hurled headlong flaming from the ethereal sky") only to elicit a bemused response: "Cut it out! You're too fresh!" (*CO*, 141). Much like his bags, Mukerji is flung across the "gulf" that separates "East" from "West." Mukerji is likened to the fallen Lucifer in this passage, which also foreshadows his hellish sojourn in the pages to come. The impossibility of majoritarian identification registers again and again, whether in the darkness of the crossing, in the fearful polarity that America represents, or in Mukerji's own fall from grace.

And yet the second half of the text seems to be an extension of the first. Although Mukerji belongs to a privileged caste, he is buffeted about during his requisite period of itinerancy, during which he must travel from town to town begging for sustenance. When he assumes his role as priest at his family temple upon his return, he discovers that he is not in his "right place" (*CO*, 115). He is summoned by a "restlessness for God" and takes to the road again, eventually making his way to the United States, where he must continue to eke out a living in an uncertain and exploitative world (*CO*, 116). As in "Caste," Mukerji's travels in "Outcast" are driven by the quotidian demands of finding accommodation and work. Much of the action of the second half of the book is supplied by his movement from one group of outcasts to the next. He begins with a group of local radicals, with

whom he undertakes a rigorous program of reading in literature and philosophy, ranging from Plato, Aristotle, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Friedrich Nietzsche, to Sophocles, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, and Henrik Ibsen. The bulk of this acquaintance in fact finds Mukerji working extra jobs to support his friends, not to mention carrying their soap-box and passing the hat while they lecture on street-corners. Mukerji's encounter with Indian nationalism is similarly unsatisfying, for it is unacceptable to him that colonialism be supplanted by "a nationalism just as crude and as greedy" (CO, 195). He finds no lasting camaraderie in the factory or the field. And his brief berth in the house of a Spiritualist comes to a disastrous end when he refuses to corroborate a practice that is anathema to his own beliefs.

The "gulf" Mukerji constructs between the two halves of the book is diminished in this comparison. For "Caste" and "Outcast" resonate with one another. Their rhyming titles, the mirror image of two lighthouses across the gulf, the mutual glare of their crisscrossing lights—all feature this resonance. The second half reads like an extension of the first: a continuance of Mukerji's quest for material and spiritual sustenance, for which he is in fact well-prepared despite his initial trepidation about the crossing. Mukerji is in search of "a new philosophy"; "what is the answer to all this?" he continually asks (CO, 193, 199). But the United States is itself "mad with restlessness," he observes (CO, 223). It is clear that he will find little in the way of answers here. In fact, he consistently disidentifies with any one group or its philosophy. The closing passage of "Outcast" expresses the unbearable equivalence of "East" and "West." "This was America," he writes, "neither worse nor better than India. All life was a wretched joke and every joke was a sordid travesty. I could bear it no longer. I turned my face toward the East and thought of India" (CO, 220). In the end, his crossing has brought him to an impasse.

Mukerji's restlessness is emblematic of the tenuous position of Indian immigrants in the United States at this time. Although their numbers were relatively small, a series of events brought Indian immigrants into the public eye. A record influx of arrivals led to successive riots in Bellingham and Vancouver in 1907, transforming the Pacific northwest borderlands into what Kornel Chang describes as a zone of "transnational white solidarity" between Canada and the United States involving nativist violence against Chinese, Japanese, and Indian immigrants.²⁸ The limited right of Indian subjects to move within the British empire was exposed in 1914 as the *Komagata Maru*, a Japanese vessel chartered by Indian immigrants, languished for months in the Vancouver harbor before being forced to return with its passengers.²⁹ In the United States, efforts at exclusion culminated in the passage of the Immigration Act of 1917, which prohibited entrants from India as part of the Asiatic Barred Zone. Wartime hysteria was brought to bear upon a largely unsuccessful collaboration between Indian revolutionaries and German agents, as a series of spectacular "German-Hindu conspiracy" trials roiled California from 1917 to 1918, resulting in the conviction of twenty-nine defendants.³⁰ A deportation drive began at the close of the war when Indians, increasingly identified with a "Hindu-Bolshevik clique," were caught up in the growing federal dragnet against radicalism.³¹ The *Thind* decision would bring Indians under the purview of the Alien Land laws passed in California and many other states, which restricted ownership of land to aliens eligible to citizenship. Land that was reclaimed for agriculture in California's Imperial, San Joaquin, and Sacramento valleys by the skill of these farmers was now touted by the Asiatic Exclusion League as "the most fertile land in the state."³² Indians evaded these laws as best they could, holding property in the name of family and friends, but they were susceptible to being defrauded of their now-illegal claims not to mention being indicted as conspirators.³³ The tenuousness of the position of Indian

immigrants was exacerbated by the fact that they lacked the protections available to some other immigrant groups due to Britain's inaction on the part of its overseas subjects. Spurred by the racism and nativism they faced in the United States, students and laborers began to organize jointly: "They now felt like Indians and were ready to act collectively as Indians," as Joan Jensen notes.³⁴

The Ghadar movement emerged out of this alliance, combining the leadership of educated exiles such as Har Dayal and Taraknath Das with the support of a broad base of primarily Punjabi laborers.³⁵ Inspired by worldwide anticolonial struggles, the movement also drew upon a strong tradition of anticolonialism in the United States.³⁶ Nationalists allied with U.S. based radicals, including Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, and Agnes Smedley, lecturing frequently as part of the I.W.W. platform.³⁷ Leaders in the movement channeled popular frustration about the lack of rights and protections in the United States toward the British empire. As one early member of the Ghadar movement, Gobind Behari Lal, recalls:

Sikhs didn't want to support Har Dayal unless he could do something about the rights of Sikhs to remain in the United States and to own property. Some of the younger Sikhs were excited, but their excitement had originated with their concern about the Asiatic Exclusion Act. They were sold on that issue. . . . We told them that it was no use to talk about the Asiatic Exclusion Act, immigration, and citizenship. They had to strike at the British because they were responsible for the way Indians were being treated in America.³⁸

Hundreds of Ghadarites left the United States with the outbreak of hostilities between Germany and Great Britain in 1914, hoping to join the fight for Indian independence. Most were captured by the British upon their arrival, but their example continued to inspire revolutionary fervor in India and abroad. The popular poetry of the movement registered this imbrication of settlement and "exodus," to use Darshan's Singh Tatla's term, linking the "coolie" status of Indians in the United States to their subjugation by the British.³⁹ Even as the experience of nativism sharpened the desire for a political homeland, it gave rise to a strenuous rights campaign launched by those who remained in the decades to come.

There is no doubt that Mukerji was acquainted with the Indian nationalist movement in the Bay Area. While at the University of California, Berkeley (from 1910 to 1913) and Stanford University from (1914 to 1916), Mukerji overlapped with Das and Dayal and likely knew of them.⁴⁰ Given the fact that he befriended local radicals while at Berkeley, it is hard to imagine that Mukerji would have been unaware of their associations with Indian students.⁴¹ Dayal lectured before the I.W.W. in Oakland in the summer of 1912 and was scheduled to lecture at another meeting in 1913 with Goldman.⁴² This was a volatile alliance, vulnerable to government repression and public hysteria, especially in the context of the war. In the course of a long campaign against alien radicalism, Dayal was arrested in March 1914 at a meeting in San Francisco on suspicion of being an anarchist.⁴³ The "German-Hindu conspiracy" trials were a nation-wide sensation with allegations about ties to Goldman and Berkman, and even Leon Trotsky, abounding.⁴⁴

In a sense, *Caste and Outcast* works to diffuse the sense of conspiracy in the public record by keeping Mukerji's radical and Indian nationalist acquaintances separate from one another. Although Mukerji published his autobiography several years after these events, he is silent on this span of time, from approximately 1914 onwards, roughly coinciding with the war. "No son-of-a-gun that is a knocker need apply there," as his fellow Indian says, seeming to voice the energetic jingoism of this

period. Mukerji was himself surveilled by the U.S. government in 1917 and 1918 for alleged anti-British activities.⁴⁵ It is no wonder that he could not see his way to Indian nationalism on the model of the United States or that he chose to remain circumspect on the matter.

Mukerji was well aware of the necessity of crafting his image, as the contrasting accounts of his immigration indicate. In the private version he told his wife and son, he presents himself as an active nationalist who narrowly evades British authorities and escapes to Japan, where he is tricked into coming to the United States; in the public version, which more closely matches the documentary record (despite Mukerji's claims to the contrary), he leaves Japan simply because he finds his studies to be too difficult, without revolutionary fervor or dramatic escape.⁴⁶

His itinerary in *Caste and Outcast* was a familiar one: in heading "West" by way of Japan, Mukerji was following the route of Indian nationalists who looked to Japan as a military and industrial model following its 1905 victory in the Russo-Japanese war.⁴⁷ Upon his departure, Mukerji implies that he will return "to improve India by means of Western materialism" (*CO*, 133). But he quickly leaves behind the prospect of Pan-Asianism for different horizons.⁴⁸ Mukerji does not continue his researches on behalf of Indian nationalism once he arrives in the United States. The burgeoning Ghadar movement, and its claims to a revolutionary American lineage, do not represent an analog to his closing vision. Rather, he would "overcome this great industrialization of the East by the West," resisting the possibility that "the East also be hooliganized in order to give the West its spiritual truth" (*CO*, 196, 197). As Gordon Chang points out, Mukerji constructs himself "as an earnest and hopeful intellectual making his way to America to better himself, an image more appealing to an American reading public"; the figure of the heroic Indian nationalist is conspicuously absent from this "Horatio Alger-like account."⁴⁹ We can see how the pressures of nativism and wartime patriotism shaped Mukerji's self-presentation, even as they mitigated against his complete transformation into a Horatio Alger figure.

The "Epilogue" of *Caste and Outcast* can be read as a mad attempt to transcend these historical conditions. Immediately after having resolved to turn his "face toward the East" at the end of "Outcast," Mukerji takes us a different direction. Unlike Mankekar and Gupta, who read in the final pages a continuation of Mukerji's "search for spiritual fulfillment" that "is both lonely and unending," I find that the autobiography takes a remarkable turn insofar as Mukerji arrives at an end in America itself.⁵⁰

Mukerji begins by offering a broad taxonomy of the different geographical regions of the United States as shaped by a range of influences from African to Asian to European. We are given an eminently porous view upon American borders. The American man and woman, fumbling their way toward the "race ideal" within their own proper domain, are transformed into emblems of "world spirit":

[A]ll these antics are forms through which the spirit of the race is passing. It is more than the spirit of the race, it is the world spirit.

America is a seed continent. All the world and all the nations are planting their best and their worst seed in this spring-smitten island. Asia has planted her mysticism, Europe has sown her seeds of diverse intellectual culture, and Africa has offered her innocence. (*CO*, 223)

In this striking image, Mukerji opens up a broad field of nativity in American soil. America becomes a synecdoche for the world, the crucible of some great global future. Grounded as it is in the soil of America, this conclusion belies the “wanderlust” of the text preceding. If not an intentional critique of prevailing discourses of restrictionism legislated in the year following the publication of *Caste and Outcast*, the epilogue represents a radical departure. America is not the product of a pure strain but is ripe for external influence, a place where foreign strains take root and are brought to fruition. Dichotomies of nativity and alienage as well as “East” and “West” are destabilized in this vision.

The effort of producing this vision becomes clear in the paragraphs with which Mukerji closes his autobiography:

America is victorious, India is conquered. America is carefree. India is careworn. America lynches Negroes. India illtreats her untouchables. America is abyss-wombed. India has given birth to her abyss. America believes in herself. India is too old to believe in herself. India has caste. America aims at equality. Thus run the resemblances and differences between the two countries.

The differences are so extreme that the extremes must meet. Both India and America are mad. India has been mad with peace and America is mad with restlessness. It is this madness that has drawn me to them both. Europe is poor fare for my hungry Hindu soul. I want the fecundity of America. I cannot live twenty-four hours a day. I want to live two days in one.

America was discovered in the name of India. Columbus, whose first name was “the Christ bearer,” set out for the land of Buddha—for India. He found instead a new land where Christ and Buddha shall meet. The voyage of Columbus ended in a mistake. The next five hundred years will prove that his error was an accuracy of the gods. (*CO*, 223)

This passage aims to create consistency out of inconsistency. The “differences between the two countries” are leavened by their “resemblances.” In fact, the distinction between them is difficult to sustain. A “victorious” and “carefree” America seems dissimilar enough from a “conquered” and “careworn” India. But it is unclear whether the lynching of black Americans is meant as a point of similarity or contrast when compared to the treatment of Dalits. The two halves of *Caste and Outcast* convey this futile difference, insofar as they are not opposites in a strict sense—“caste and “outcast” both signifying modes of dispossession. This is a parody of opposition. Witness Mukerji’s closing of the previous section: all life a “wretched joke,” each joke a “sordid travesty.” India might well be “mad with peace” and America “mad with restlessness,” but it is their common “madness” that “draws” Mukerji to both. In the end, the effort to yoke the two is itself mad. This is syncretism—a comparison of seeming opposites that ultimately serves to destabilize their opposition. Mukerji achieves synthesis by way of antithesis, conjoining India and America in the extremity of their contrast. Columbus’s error is proven accurate: his misguided voyage justifies the rapprochement of India and America not only within the span of the text but in the context of a wider Orientalist ambition seeking to fulfill Columbus’s original destiny.⁵¹ We are reminded of the circular logic of Orientalism that emerged in the Syrian examples, producing the union of “East” and “West.”

The absence of brown character here is striking. In a sense, the epilogue offers a characterization of brownness without personifying brown character: a majoritarian identification that exceeds the minority of the protagonist himself. Mukerji does not figure in the conclusion to his

autobiography. Instead, he insists on dealing in “cosmocentric” rather than “homocentric” units of time: “In America, man is what he is in Asia; he is, as he ought to be, an episode in the life cycle of a continent. He learns that the universe is not homocentric, but cosmocentric. Man’s life in America seems like the flight of gnats in a wind-swept field” (*CO*, 222). We know as little as the gnat in the field what future this scene of nativity will conceive. Like the epilogue in which it is contained, the meeting of India and America takes place outside the body of the autobiography, beyond the bounds of any single human life. The closing passages of *Caste and Outcast* illuminate a far-flung future. It is on this scale that the figurative seeds Mukerji plants in the field of America will bear fruit.

Ultimately, Mukerji is not able to incorporate this vision into the story of his life. The epilogue is a strange and wonderful postscript that does not find a place within his autobiographical narration. Mukerji prepares the reader for this excess from the very beginning. In a short but revealing set of introductory comments that preface his earlier recollections of his life, Mukerji expresses a “dilemma” that the “narrative, slight as it is, seems to require continual interruption in order to explain the real meaning of the simple incidents. . . . But there has been so much misconception about India . . . that I am tempted to let the narrative go to the wall in favor of what a western friend of mine calls ‘the oriental’s fondness for vague philosophizing’” (*CO*, 45). Given the gap between the “real” India and prevalent “misconception,” Mukerji feels the need to gloss his autobiography. And yet “narrative” does not provide the surest access to India’s interior life: “to convey this in a manner consistent with the western idea of what a book ought to be. I fear it is impossible” (*CO*, 46). He does not find better guidance elsewhere: the ubiquitous Rudyard Kipling is a mere “painter of Indian life,” according to Mukerji, showing what “the eye alone can take in” (*CO*, 45). Neither image nor narrative tells the whole story. Where “continual interruption” and “vague philosophizing” are requisite, any attempt at coherence is doomed to fail.

Mukerji does, however, find an answer to his dilemma: “an object which figures much in American controversial, if not philosophic life—I mean the ‘soap box.’ And when my western auditor sees me mounting this humble platform to quote and expound, I hope for a degree of sympathy with my effort to present a more intimate impression of eastern life” (*CO*, 46). He offers a dramatic mode that performs argument, registering voice without sustained plotting or description (emphases that become even more pronounced in the second half of the text). This mode is theatrical rather than novelistic. It elevates dialog over image and oratory over writing. The epilogue makes sense in these terms, not as the narrative conclusion but as a philosophical digression. The fact that Mukerji cannot bring himself into this ending testifies to his tenuous position within the United States at the time. He must prophesy the meeting of India and America, as though from a soap-box, rather than arriving at it by way of conclusion to his life.

Syncretism in Crisis

The “Epilogue” of *Caste and Outcast* shows a remarkable affinity with Rihani’s characterization of the Superman of America in *The Book of Khalid*. Both writers foresee a syncretic destiny for America. They imagine a combinative future, incorporating a range of transcontinental, transnational, and transregional influences into a vision of the United States that comes to stand in for the world. Their prophecies produce a circular logic of Orientalism that conjoins “East” and “West,” locating the idea of “America” at the site of this union.

At the same time, their visions are not identical. The Superman of America is conceived early on in *The Book of Khalid*, leaving the rest of the narrative to unfold his prospects. Khalid is an exemplar of brown character, who seeks to conjoin Arabism with Americanism, an alliance that Rihani would himself advance in *Letters to Uncle Sam*. Mukerji's vision, on the other hand, is presented as an afterthought to the story of his life. We are not given to know what his prophecy portends. Certainly no Superman is poised to rise out of this "cosmocentric" (as opposed to "homocentric") vision. We have here a "spring-smitten island," planted with the "best" and the "worst seed" of the world—the uncertain ground, for better or worse, of future's unfolding. America, the "iron-loined spiritual Mother" in Rihani's account, is portrayed as "abyss-wombed" by Mukerji, propagating a future that is at once less salutary and more inconclusive.⁵² This abyssal destiny is posed in the form of a question to which Mukerji has no answer at present: "Then will it be too much to say that in five hundred years America will have a culture unique, magnificent, and overpowering?" (*CO*, 222). Both Rihani and Mukerji discover their homeland in the discovery of the Americas. But Mukerji foresees a future that is more uncertain than the one Rihani attempts to realize.

These shared, though nonidentical visions were shaped by distinct, yet interwoven, genealogies of Orientalism that situated India at a comparatively further horizon than Syria. This distinction is suggested by a small but intriguing detail from Khalil Gibran's biography, namely that he falsely alluded to having been born in India, claiming, in the words of his biographer, "mystical" Indian origins.⁵³ Coming of age in New England during the "Boston Brahmin" vogue, Gibran would no doubt have registered the particular appeal of the Far East, the "especial spiritual patina" of South Asians in the United States, to use Prashad's phrase.⁵⁴ Indeed, many donned this "patina" of the "East," both literally and symbolically, whether makeshift gurus exploiting credulous audiences, Indian nationalists taking on the status of a "Demi-god," or African Americans putting on turbans to blunt the effects of racism.⁵⁵

Although Indians did not have the Protestant cultural capital of the Holy Land, their immigration was informed by an Orientalism that fashioned India as a repository of spirituality that could leaven the materialism of the United States.⁵⁶ Vivekananda spoke at the Parliament of Religions at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, introducing the cadences of "Guru English" to a captive American audience before going on to establish the Ramakrishna-Vedanta movement in the United States.⁵⁷ Mukerji not only lived at the Ramakrishna Center in San Francisco but capitalized on his links to this movement, publishing *The Face of Silence* (1926) detailing the life and teachings of Ramakrishna.⁵⁸ Under the sign of the "Orient," India was not only a point of contrast for the advances of modernity and a panacea for its ills, it was also a product of consumption, implicated in the rise of what Melani McAlister calls "Commodity Orientalism" at the turn of the century.⁵⁹ Bereft of the typological future that the Holy Land portended, India functioned as the repository of an unchanging past, the far horizon (as opposed to the near or Middle East) against which a progressive vision of the "West" could be produced. As Malini Johar Schueller argues, Asia was the repository of "fate, immobility, unity, and passivity," an "absolute spiritual past, against which a whole and unified New World nationhood as the latest seat of the westerly, Anglo-Saxon movement of civilization could be formulated."⁶⁰ Although India contained "elements for the salvation of the United States," this Eastern spirituality was found to be "inferior to the real sacrament, Christianity," in Prashad's words.⁶¹

The status of India and Syria in the American imagination was also influenced by Indian and Syrian racialization at the turn of the century. For a time, these groups shared the limited privilege of being admitted to citizenship in numerous lower court cases due to their classification as Caucasian according to the racial science of the period. *In re Najour*, a 1909 case that “reasoned syllogistically from Caucasian to ‘white’ to citizen” found the Syrian appellant to be white and was relied upon to admit Indians to citizenship.⁶² Syrians wrote an *amicus curiae* brief in the naturalization case of an Indian applicant in 1910, hoping that a positive finding would influence Syrian outcomes as well.⁶³

Bhagat Singh Thind drew upon the logics of *Najour* to make his case, arguing that he was Caucasian and therefore white; he went so far as to claim an “Aryan” affinity based upon common modes of subjugation in the caste system of India and racism in the United States, as though evoking Mukerji’s litany of “resemblances” in the Epilogue.⁶⁴ The Supreme Court did not dispute Thind’s claim to being Caucasian. “It may be true that the blond Scandinavian and the brown Hindu have a common ancestor in the dim reaches of antiquity,” the opinion read, “but the average man knows perfectly well that there are unmistakable and profound differences between them today.”⁶⁵ “Hindus” were found to be non-white—specifically, “brown”—their juridical fate divorced from that of Syrians. “Hindus Too Brunette to Vote Here,” one magazine article triumphantly pronounced.⁶⁶ Difference was a matter of race, rather than dress. In a sense, brownness was construed as a racial category in its own right, an impediment to Thind’s mixed identifications.

The denaturalizations that followed (at least sixty-five between 1923 and 1927) proved disastrous in many cases, especially when combined with the impact of the Alien Land Laws that were upheld by the Supreme Court in the same year as the *Thind* decision.⁶⁷ One denaturalized immigrant, Vaisho Das Bagai, committed suicide, writing in his farewell letter, “I am no longer an American citizen . . . What have I made of myself and my children? We cannot exercise our rights, we cannot leave this country. . . . Obstacles this way, blockades that way, and the bridges burnt behind.”⁶⁸ Issued in the same year as *Thind*, Mukerji’s autobiography emblemizes the fraught findings in this case, which “would widen the gulf between East and West,” as Jensen aptly notes, recalling Mukerji’s own view upon this distance.⁶⁹ Given the “bridges burnt,” it is no wonder that the crossing between “East” and “West” appeared to Mukerji to be so formidable.

The tenuous position of Indian immigrants was compounded by the fact that they found themselves on the wrong side of an Anglo-American alliance. Britain’s relative disregard for its overseas subjects influenced the treatment of Indian immigrants from the very beginning, offering little incentive for the U.S. government to intervene on their behalf even as President Theodore Roosevelt held forth on the merits of empire.⁷⁰ The activities of Indian revolutionaries had increasingly come under scrutiny in a growing web of political surveillance undertaken by British officials, often with American support. The outbreak of World War I offered new avenues for intimidation. With the discovery of German support of a shipment of weapons to India secured by Indian immigrant revolutionaries, the time was ripe for charges of “conspiracy” to be brought against involved parties in what was arguably a violation of U.S. neutrality.⁷¹ Jensen argues that the “charge of conspiracy branded the Indians with the image of secrecy and evil plotting”; the emphasis on “Indian nationalist collaboration with German officials made the Indian revolutionary movement appear to be a conflict essentially different from that waged by the American colonies against Great Britain 160 years earlier.”⁷² The term, “ghadar,” wrested by Dayal and others from its mutinous implications in British India to signify anticolonial revolution, was once again subsumed under the sign of treachery.⁷³

American entry into the war, which occasions Rihani's prompt return from Spain in *Letters to Uncle Sam*, coincided with the first arrests in this so-called "conspiracy," spelling a very different fate for Indian immigrants.⁷⁴ We can see how the geopolitical relationship of the United States to British India shapes not only the status of Indian immigrants but the scope of Mukerji's closing vision in *Caste and Outcast*. He cannot see his way to the coincidence of Indian and American nationalism in the crucible of the war. The Middle East appears, after all, to be closer than the Far East. Mukerji faces a wider gulf, a deeper contradiction, that structures the antithesis with which he closes his text. The relationship of India and America can only be resolved in a distant future, beyond the bounds of Mukerji's self-characterization.

In the aftermath of World War I, Syrian and Indian fates were joined in a shared disillusionment with the continuance of "paternalistic imperialism" in the League of Nations.⁷⁵ Indians had stood by Britain in the war, but their hopes for greater self-governance were unfulfilled, with only superficial reforms being made. The Home Rule League was unsuccessful in obtaining representation from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at the Paris Peace Conference where Britain kept the question of Indian independence off the table; President Woodrow Wilson limited the application of his Fourteen Points for the Treaty of Versailles as far as Britain and France were concerned, especially the fifth point endorsing self-determination.⁷⁶

Mukerji's biography takes a similar turn to Rihani's during this period. After the publication of *Caste and Outcast* and partly as a result of its success, Mukerji moved with his family to France and then to Switzerland. Like other expatriate American intellectuals and writers of the "Lost Generation," he claimed international connections, once remarking that he must have been French in a prior life.⁷⁷ He did not return until 1928, settling in the United States but never naturalizing as a citizen. Even as his popularity soared, Mukerji grew increasingly troubled. A fight with his publisher as well as the controversy over Katherine Mayo's widely read unflattering portrayal of India, *Mother India* (1927), gave him concern over his "moral conduct" and led him to feel "that he was failing in his mission as a cultural interpreter and that his efforts at encouraging East-West understanding were coming to naught."⁷⁸ The "gulf" Mukerji constructed in his autobiography must have seemed to him quite real. After a series of nervous breakdowns, he committed suicide in 1936 and was survived by his wife and son.

It is intriguing that Rihani and Mukerji looked to the promise of "America" for a brief time in their lives before turning away. *The Book of Khalid* and *Caste and Outcast* represent their majoritarian identifications in related ways. The Superman of America, a paradigmatic brown character, imagines an extravagant majoritarian identification that is intercontinental in scope, that reevaluates the dichotomies of Orientalism. As in Rihani's prophecy, Mukerji's "seed continent" becomes a synecdoche for the world. He reaches comparable imaginative heights, as he expounds upon the conjoining of India and America from the exalted vantage of his soap-box. Both figures occupy a transcendental vantage, in a substantive and formal sense.

Wanting "to create a sense of freedom in people's souls," Mukerji echoes Khalid's ambition: "no Revolution without a Reformation" (*CO*, 195).⁷⁹ Both *Caste and Outcast* and *The Book of Khalid* champion spiritual revolution in advance of material or industrial revolution. A transcendentalist spirituality is the modality in which the circular logic of Orientalism is elaborated; it is the hallowed ground upon which the meeting of "East" and "West" is effected. In fact, Mukerji and Rihani were interested in American Transcendentalism, itself "influential in the formation of the earliest form of 'multicultural' theory in the United States: comparative religious thought," as Lawrence Buell points

out.⁸⁰ They were friends with Van Wyck Brooks, a noted literary critic of the movement. Like Rihani, Mukerji came to Eastern religion through the Orientalist spirituality of the West, learning about Ramakrishna from Josephine MacLeod in Los Angeles in 1914.⁸¹ These intellectual affinities shape the prophetic imaginations of both writers.

The transcendental form of their visions is also noteworthy. Khalid is an extravagant character, a prophetic figure whose visionary idealism propels the alliance of America and Arabia. Mukerji must absent himself from his prophecy in order to advance it. In a sense, both writers must transcend the limits of the autobiographical in order to advance their speculations. As I have shown, these visions are continually subject to a “sub-transcendental” corrective: interruptive narration, the clash of multiple perspectives, the weight of Mukerji’s status as “Outcast” being brought to bear upon his syncretic closing. This is where mania enters as a useful anchor—helping to conceptualize this vulnerable idealism, this blind universalism, this syncretism in crisis. In effect, Mukerji and Rihani’s work shows us that the effort to yoke majoritarian and minoritarian identifications is a mad effort.

Congressman from India

Congressman from India was published during Saund’s second congressional term. It details Saund’s birth in Chhajalwadi, a village in Punjab, his upbringing within a Sikh tradition, his studies, and his eventual immigration. He arrives at the Ferry Building in San Francisco in 1920, having journeyed through Europe and New York to the West. After studying Agriculture and Mathematics at the University of California, Berkeley, he moves to the Imperial Valley to make his living as a farmer. He becomes something of a public figure in the community, giving lectures on the Indian independence movement, becoming involved in the Democratic party, and serving as judge in the town of Westmorland. Saund is ultimately elected Representative for the 29th Congressional district in 1956 (and re-elected for two more terms before a debilitating stroke would end his career). The autobiography closes with Saund’s international tour as a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, visiting Hawaii, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines, Thailand, Burma, India, and Pakistan.

Despite the fact that Saund had an acclaimed (though brief) career as a public servant, he has received little notice. His autobiography is read primarily for insights into mid-century politics and the struggle for immigrants’ rights.⁸² Recently, critics have begun to study the autobiography as a work of literature, in addition to a historical document. Sandhya Shukla, for instance, argues that “a certain transnationalism underlies the new Americanism that Saund proposes,” pointing out that “Saund could be seen as more American precisely because he was Indian.”⁸³ I build upon this proposition, reading Saund’s autobiography in the comparative context of brown character. The title of the autobiography speaks volumes, for the Congressman from California can in fact hail from India, a substitution that positions India as a district within the geopolitical purview of the United States. Saund’s challenge is to craft himself as the representative of his constituents. He is the majority-identified minority character par excellence. For his job depends upon his successful self-characterization as brown. As I show in this reading, Saund’s transnationalism is but one feature of the production of brown character in *Congressman from India*, which also depends upon Saund’s marriage into the white American family, his campaign for naturalization and newfound equality, and his construction of a genealogy between the American and Indian revolutionary. His success is

assured by the Cold War propaganda function his election serves: to convince the world that the American Dream is in fact an exceptional reality. In effect, Saund qua Congressman embodies the future augured by Mukerji and Rihani—an American Superman, by his own estimation, buoyed by the power of American democracy.

Like Mukerji, Saund sets out to best Kipling from the very beginning. In the preface, he writes: “Kipling said, ‘East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.’ Clearly, he was wrong, for a Saund from the East met a Kosa from the West. God blessed them with three marvelous children.”⁸⁴ The back cover of the book frankly symbolizes this meeting. A smaller photograph on the top left corner shows a garlanded Saund and his family being welcomed to his village in India. But the centerpiece is a photograph of Saund with his wife, Marian Kosa, his children, and his son-and daughter-in-law. This black-and-white image paradoxically testifies to Saund’s brown character. He stages his asymptotic whiteness: not white, but close. As Saund puts it, “I had become a close part of American life. I had married an American girl, and was the father of three American children. I was making America my home” (*CFI*, 72). Saund’s marriage to Kosa is the cornerstone of Saund’s production of brown character, inaugurating the autobiography’s rapprochement of “East” and “West.”

Susan Koshy’s coinage of “sexual naturalization” is apt here insofar as it suggests that intermarriage is itself a mode of naturalization. Koshy argues that the “white man-Asian woman dyad has historically been more serviceable to signifying the assimilability of Asian Americans than the Asian man-white woman dyad, which typically emplotted the cultural impossibility and sexual danger of incorporating Asians into the nation.”⁸⁵ But Saund’s frank disclosure of his marriage suggests that the Asian man-white woman dyad might also signify assimilability, or perhaps that assimilation is not Saund’s chief concern. His marriage can be read to symbolize the possibility of mixed identification that is nonetheless majoritarian: an idealized union that not only brings Saund to the “West” but also brings Kosa to the “East,” as the photograph documenting her visit to India indicates on the back cover, if only on terms palatable to Saund’s readership.

Although this rapprochement appears to be always already complete, from the very moment one encounters the autobiography, the remainder of *Congressman from India* must in fact convince the reader of Saund’s representative status. Saund describes how he makes his “home” in the Imperial Valley, arriving there in the summer of 1925 in the path of Indian immigrants before him.⁸⁶ Moving to this agricultural valley was a kind of homecoming for these immigrants. Karen Leonard’s ethnography reveals that many farmers saw California in the image of Punjab: “On arriving in the Sacramento Valley, one could not help but be reminded of the Punjab,” wrote Puna Singh in 1924 upon moving to northern California.⁸⁷ Another Punjabi immigrant, writing many years later, described Northern California’s Sacramento Valley in terms of familiar Punjabi landmarks:

In my story the Land of Five Rivers was Sacramento Valley. The river Sutlej was Feather River. The rest of the four rivers—American, Bear, Yuba, and Sacramento. My Bhakhra (Dam), the Oroville Dam. My Govind Sagar, the Oroville Lake. The city of Anandpur Sahib, the nearby town of Paradise. The Shivaliks, the Sierra foothills. There was Naina Devi, our Mount Shasta. And yes, the Jawalamukhi, the Lassen Volcanic Park. Obviously, I was carried away by my imagination. Yet, the reality was not left far behind. The water, like the water in

the Punjab, had the same urge to run downward. The distant hills had the same charm. The fire in Jawalamukhi and in the Lassen Volcano has the same way to burn things!⁸⁸

Here, immigrant nativity (as in Chapter 1) is an imaginative concern. With a degree of creative license, the geography of the old world could be read in the new.

Finding himself on somewhat familiar terrain, Saund met with considerable success as a farmer. His “Early Days in Imperial Valley” (as the chapter is titled) see his transition from the foreman of a cotton-picking gang to ranch-owner. He describes his various forays into different crops, including lettuce, melons, and alfalfa, as well as his ongoing struggle with the economic vagaries of the Great Depression. His treatment of Indian farmers is cursory.⁸⁹ Much of his time in the Imperial Valley is spent building his future political career from a partisan vantage, addressed primarily to his white constituents. Figures like “Uncle Ben” abound, lending their wisdom, their farming equipment, or their good will to help him make his start—this in contrast to the “rich Singh” who fails to vouch for Saund in one instance (*CFI*, 61, 63). The California farmer is presented as an honest yet beleaguered man, beset by economic woes and subject to the whims of nature, ranging from floods to drought, grasshoppers to blackbirds, with Saund’s concern extending even to Dust Bowl migrants. His closing comments point to the “urgent need of landownership reform and the creation of conditions whereby the people generally will have a sense of belonging,” obliquely referencing the history of alien divestments; but he is looking to “the people generally,” to the broader field of his constituents, touting Democratic agrarian reforms for which noncitizen Indians would have been ineligible (*CFI*, 187).⁹⁰ He is the dutiful son-in-law of the white family, the appreciative nephew of Uncle Ben, whose sympathies are primarily with the white farmer.

These family ties naturalize Saund’s political ambition. The extended version of the quotation I cite briefly above is revealing:

I had become a close part of American life. I had married an American girl, and was the father of three American children. I was making America my home. Thus it was only natural that I felt very uncomfortable not being able to become a citizen of the United States. My social life may have been full and rewarding, but the political desire in me was sorely frustrated. And I wanted to be a part of all American life, both social and political. I was every bit as aware of the political happenings on the American scene as anyone around me, and was acquainted with the history of America and the lives of its great men. I was dedicated to what is called the American way of life and yet when I looked in front of me I saw that the bars of citizenship were shut tight against me. I knew if these bars were lifted I would see much wider gates of opportunity open to me, opportunity as existed for everybody else in the United States of America. (*CFI*, 72)

It is “only natural” to Saund that his familial kinship begs the question of his political kinship. Sexual naturalization will not suffice. There is a “political desire” in him that will not be satisfied but by the opening of the “gates of opportunity,” by access to citizenship. As is to be expected of a Congressman, Saund believes he will have a fair hearing before Congress; “if only we could present our story,” he writes, “there could never be a ‘no’ answer to our simple plea for rights to apply for American citizenship” (*CFI*, 73). The “Fight for Citizenship” is startlingly brief for a chapter of that title, which telescopes “four years of long waiting and hard effort” into this brief phrase (*CFI*, 75).

Although Saund was not at the center of this naturalization campaign, historians position him as an important California contact for East Coast organizers and a point of relay between developments in the campaign and local Indian farmers.⁹¹ But he does not go into detail about his efforts. Instead, the campaign gets an unexplained boost from President Harry Truman at the final hour—a kind of “deus ex machina intervention,” as Rajini Srikanth points out.⁹² Saund receives his naturalization papers in what seems to be a matter of course. The challenge of obtaining citizenship appears to be always already surmounted, as though a “simple plea” is all that is needed to win over the American people to his cause.

This proves to be a tenuous victory, as Saund finds out over the course of his ensuing campaigns for public office. In the following exchange, a friend and neighbor questions Saund’s suitability to serve in the office of local judge:

“I’ll be frank with you, Saund. I want an American to be the judge in Westmorland.”

Then I asked him what fault he found in my Americanism and his answer was: “Well, you’re a kind of an American, I suppose, but I can trace my own origin to a family that came over on the *Mayflower*.”

I congratulated him on his ancestry and then asked him what precinct he voted in and whether he’d voted in the last election.

“What a strange question. I vote in the Spruce precinct and I’ve never missed voting in an election since I became twenty-one years old.”

Then I asked him how many ballots he had been given.

“What a foolish question for an educated man to ask,” he said testily. “They gave me one ballot.”

“Well, Mr. Boarts,” I said. “Isn’t that a strange coincidence. I just got one ballot, too.” (CFI, 80)

Boarts see Saund as only “a kind of an American” whose claim to American identity cannot compare to his own. The *Mayflower* immigration is figured by Boarts as the fount of American nativity, a nativity to which a latecomer like Saund cannot lay claim. From Saund’s perspective, however, Mr. Boarts’s origins do not carry any more weight than his own: they each get only one vote. In effect, naturalization breaks down the dichotomy of alienage and nativity, enabling the production of brown character. Saund counts as much as any other American.

This accounting is crucial for Saund’s production of brown character. For he is able to be the Congressman *from India* in the context of an American democracy. The closing of the autobiography proclaims that there “is no room in the United States of America for second-class citizenship. In Uncle Sam’s family there are no foster children. All American citizens must enjoy equal rights under the law” (CFI, 192). As Srikanth points out, “Saund willingly embraces the rhetoric of a democratic and fully participatory American society.”⁹³ Nonetheless, this embrace is continually thwarted. Despite the modicum of equality Saund claims through naturalization, he cannot in fact “go native.” Boarts’s objection belies Saund’s roseate view. The closing lines of the text suggest this gap between Saund’s idealization and the reality: that American citizens “*must*” have equal rights inasmuch as they do not already possess them.

Saund’s claim to being in Uncle Sam’s family is linked to “rights.” This rights discourse supplements the sexual naturalization implicit in Saund’s marriage into the white American family.

The explicit question of Indian racialization was not taken up by the Luce-Cellar Act of 1946, which granted naturalization to all Indians (while preserving the stringent quota limitations on the group) via congressional rather than juridical remedy. With the outbreak of World War II, American and Indian interests became more closely aligned as thousands of American troops were deployed to India in 1943 in order to prevent Axis advancement in Asia. The “India Lobby” began to push for a comprehensive bill that would allow all Indian immigrants to naturalize.⁹⁴ J.J. Singh, a dynamic but controversial figure in the movement for naturalization, pushed the analogy between India and China, given that Chinese immigrants had only recently been granted naturalization in the 1943 Magnuson Act, partly as a result of the coincidence of Chinese and American war aims.

Congresswoman Clare Booth Luce described Indian naturalization as “a diplomatic and political measure against our present and future enemies,” highlighting India’s substantial contributions to the war.⁹⁵ Although Congress debated the findings of *Thind* once more, it chose to amend the law rather than rely on the courts to redefine the meaning of whiteness.⁹⁶ The campaign for naturalization had shifted from racial to political grounds, coincident with American war aims.

Saund capitalizes on this shift, supplementing his racial kinship with a political kinship between India and the United States. From his very “Beginnings in India,” as the first chapter is titled, Saund establishes a contrast between British tyranny and American democracy. Even as he schools the reader in the British colonization of India—telling the history of broken promises in the aftermath of World War I, violent suppression exemplified by the massacre at Jallianwalla Bagh, and the rise of the Indian nationalist struggle under Gandhi—he shows himself to be learning about the United States. He lauds the American revolution, “a revolution which, in my opinion has done more to bring joy and dignity into the lives of men than anything that has happened before or since in recorded history”; he learns about Abraham Lincoln and his Gettysburg Address, his admiration growing with Woodrow Wilson’s wartime pronouncements, among them, “self-determination for all peoples” (*CFI*, 29). “Government of the people, by the people, and for the people,’ had particular meaning,” Saund writes, yoking American revolutionary history to the Indian freedom struggle (*CFI*, 30).

It is possible that he learns these lessons from the Ghadar movement, which seldom referenced the plight of Indian immigrants in arguing for anticolonial revolution, instead presenting homegrown arguments for liberty by figures ranging from George Washington to Wilson.⁹⁷ Despite setbacks faced by the early revolutionaries, the nationalist movement continued in the United States after World War I.⁹⁸ Ghadarites joined together with East Coast nationalists and a broader league of Friends for the Freedom of India to oppose deportations of Indian political prisoners.⁹⁹ The 1920 launch of *The Independent Hindustan* in English, while a short-lived publication, signaled a shift within the movement towards targeting the American public; another monthly launched in 1923 was called *The United States of India*. Dayal had proposed a publication with a similar title in 1915: “This name will affect the States as it presents a definite ideal,” he wrote, “it will please the American public and will be good for safety.”¹⁰⁰ The revolutionary American lineage strained by the German-Hindu “conspiracy” could now be refashioned by Indian nationalists seeking to promote an independent India on the model of an independent United States.

In effect, Saund claims this political genealogy, linking India to the United States in the name of the founding fathers. When he arrives in the United States, he is greeted by an inspector sympathetic to India’s freedom cause: “You are now a free man in a free country,” the inspector says, “You do not have to worry about the C.I.D. either” (*CFI*, 35). From this bastion of freedom, Saund

can look ahead to a “future” in which “the great political experiment launched by the Founding Fathers will be assured,” as he proclaims in the closing line of the autobiography (*CFI*, 192).

This production of mixed identification requires that Saund elide those instances where the United States proves to be patently unfree. This elision does not take shape as an outright denial, for Saund acknowledges on several occasions the “keen discrimination” he faces, the “discriminatory legislation known as the Alien Land Act,” and “the considerable prejudice against the people of Asia in California,” not to mention the paucity of “opportunities for me or people of my nationality in the state at that time” (*CFI*, 40-1, 45). But *Congressman from India* has a tendency to couch racism and nativism in terms of “a generalized inhumanity of man to man,” as Srikanth points out, coupled with a propensity to gloss over the details of anti-immigrant sentiment.¹⁰¹

Saund tends to take recourse to what can be described as an ethos of sportsmanship, presenting the United States as a level playing field. His declaration in the face of a sustained campaign to oppose his election on the grounds of his birthplace and race, strikes one as more than a little strained: “If I do not succeed in my objective to be elected to Congress, I shall know that it will not be because of the place of my birth or the color of my skin, but because the voters of the 29th Congressional District decided to send someone better than myself to Washington” (*CFI*, 109). When a fellow Californian launches a rather strident objection to Saund’s naturalization campaign, telling him “you ought to have you head examined” for pursuing this course, Saund makes a similarly sporting defense: “I laughed, but told my friend that I had great faith in the American sense of justice and fair play and the righteousness of my cause” (*CFI*, 73).

His sanguine outlook seems to be shaped by a childhood lesson imparted to him by his mother. Home on summer vacation, he plays with the local boys and is hurt and ostracized, partly because his playmates are resentful of his relatively privileged position; when he runs home crying to his mother, she pushes him away, saying, “Son, you went out to play with boys of your own age and came home crying. Let that be the first and the last time. When you go out to play with other boys, you’ve got to take care of yourself—if you can’t, just stay away” (*CFI*, 21). Saund’s entry onto the playing field presages his later entry into the public eye. He must learn to overcome his difference, to be self-reliant or quit the competitive arena altogether. As a result, his successes appear to be the result of hard-won effort and inherent qualifications: that there is in fact no “better” representative than Saund for Congress.

In the context of his congressional campaign, Saund is even able to turn his opponents’ attempts to malign him to his own uses:

My opposition, as I have said, made an attempt to use my Indian origin against me. I decided to turn it to my own advantage and announced on a television broadcast that if elected I would immediately fly to India and the Far East. I would appear before the people there and tell them, “You have been listening to the insidious propaganda of the Communists that there is prejudice and discrimination in the United States against your people. Look, here I am. I am a living example of American democracy in action. I was elected by the free vote of the people in a very conservative district of the state of California to membership in the most powerful legislative body on earth. Where else in the world could that happen?” (*CFI*, 108)

He presents his victory as a self-fulfilling prophecy that confirms the American dream, auguring his own usefulness as anti-Communist propaganda.¹⁰² If elected, he promises to go forth and proclaim the party line about American democracy. Saund can deploy his Indian nativity in service of his majoritarian identity: according to him, he is nowhere more American than when he is the Congressman from India.

This happy coincidence is built into the very structure of the autobiography. The very first line of *Congressman from India* in fact finds the Congressman returning *to* India:

It was ten-thirty on the evening of November 24, 1957, when the plane from Rangoon, Burma, landed on the airport of Calcutta, India. I had strange feelings of joy and anticipation for I was about to set foot on the soil of India, the land of my birth, after an absence of thirty-seven years. As the plane came to a stop, I could see that a large crowd had gathered. . . .

It was a really grand home-coming reception and welcome for a former son of India, now a member of the United States Congress, and a joyous occasion for me and my family. (*CFI*, 11)

It is as though the distant meeting of “East” and “West” foreseen by Mukerji is realized in this future time. Saund can be forthright about his empirical nativity (the “land of my birth”) in the course of this tour as an American Congressman. But he is careful to modulate the implications of his return. His actual “home-coming” to Chhajalwadi is quite brief, a scene of farewell as much as reunion that lasts for less than a day. Saund finds an old saying that he inscribed on a wall with three cousins, now dead: “Let us enjoy the company of friends and be gay, because the time of parting is growing near”; the “tears” he sheds upon the occasion of his departure do not hold him back for long, as he immediately resumes his official tour (*CFI*, 179). He is no doubt a “former son,” beholden by his majoritarian identifications to the United States as much as to India. His return to the old world ultimately brings him back to the new.

Even though Saund acknowledges racism and nativism, he denies their significance for him. Even the moment of his arrival in the United States is not free from this contradiction. To the inspector’s welcome he responds, “for as long as I have been in the United States, particularly in the early years, while I was cruelly discriminated against many a time because of the place of my birth, not once has my right to say what I pleased been questioned by any man” (*CFI*, 36). The promise of “America” is belied in Saund’s acknowledgment that he has been “cruelly discriminated against” for being Indian by birth. This confession is nonrestrictive, however, and does not delimit the meaning of Saund’s newfound freedom: he can rhetorically circumvent the discrimination he faces while nonetheless being able to mention it.

In another instance, he writes: “America exemplified for me the highest form of democracy. Its people had developed a system based upon the Declaration of Independence and the belief that all men are created equal. Human dignity was recognized and (with some notable exceptions) the principles of democracy were practiced” (*CFI*, 44-45). Amid this encomium comes a discrepant parenthetical claim that does not substantially alter the overall meaning. Exceptions to the “principles of democracy” are themselves excepted within the sentence’s frame. All Saund need do is step outside the bracketed purview of exceptions to American democracy. In fact, Saund’s successes are the exception rather than the rule. But he presents himself as the exception to the exception that

proves the rule—the rule of American democracy that is. Saund is neither the subject of racism or nativism nor is he subject to them. He is what Rihbany describes as the “type of the talented foreigner,” excepted from black and white logics of discrimination.

Saund’s willingness to represent this exemption proves useful in the context of the Cold War. News of his successful campaign was broadcast far and wide, partly at the behest of the United States Information Agency. Shortly after his election, Saund travelled around the world in the winter of 1957 as a one-man subcommittee of the Foreign Affairs Committee, following in the footsteps of government officials and bureaucrats who sought allies in the Cold War. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles went to Egypt and India in 1953 hoping to swell American ranks, but India chose not to sign on to the Baghdad Pact of 1955 brokered by the United States.¹⁰³ Jawaharlal Nehru would go on to help found the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961, uniting those countries unwilling to join either superpower under the stated aim of “peaceful co-existence,” crafting a third world “project” motivated partly by the Afro-Asian alliance forged at Bandung.¹⁰⁴ The affinity between the black freedom struggle and third world liberation was not lost on either side. Nehru, Gandhi, and Vivekananda before them, had spoken out against the subjugation of African Americans; in 1946 Nehru critiqued U.S. “assimilation” and the drive to “make every citizen a 100 per cent American,” given that “negroes, though they may be 100 per cent American, are a race apart, deprived of many opportunities and privileges, which others have as a matter of course.”¹⁰⁵ On his first visit to India in 1959, Martin Luther King commented that “the strongest bond of fraternity was the common cause of minority and colonial peoples in America, Africa and Asia struggling to throw off racism and imperialism.”¹⁰⁶ Jay Saunders Redding, author of *An American in India* (1954), went on a speaking tour sponsored by the State Department and found that Indians “told me that I was ‘one of them,’ that (obviously, because of my color) I looked like a ‘Madrassi,’ or a ‘Bengali’”; at the same time they asked him, “Why has no colored person ever held high office in America?”¹⁰⁷ Justice William O. Douglas, part of the Warren Court that decided *Brown v. Board of Education*, toured India in 1950 and noted in his travel narrative, *Strange Lands and Friendly People* (1951), that “the attitude of the United States toward its colored minorities is a powerful factor in our relations with India.”¹⁰⁸

In a chapter entitled, “My Trip Abroad,” Saund takes it upon himself to re-imagine this relationship, offering a detailed account of his journey. As Srikanth points out, Saund’s “awareness of the United States’ dependency on the trust of other nations complicates a reading of him as unequivocally and uncritically jingoistic.”¹⁰⁹ I want to focus here on the particular function he fulfills as a brown character, speaking for the United States. In the face of his blandishments about American democracy, audiences repeatedly question him about issues ranging from the Little Rock crisis to American interventionism and foreign occupation. His response to questions about racial segregation is illuminating: this is not a matter of “finding fault with each other,” he says, as if channeling his mother’s childhood admonishment, but of accepting that “the people of the United States . . . are trying to do the best they can”; he adds, “we were working hard at the job and were determined to get it done” (*CFI*, 157).

The implicit proof of this effort to fight racism is his own successful election, which tempers the disagreeable facts of black subjugation in the United States. He explains the significance of his upward mobility in no uncertain terms, reasoning that the warm welcome he receives (by his own account) points to the existence of “a great reservoir of respect and affection for the United States of America” (*CFI*, 183). His task is not ultimately to change public opinion the world over but to confirm the good opinion his own constituents have of themselves, to present a vision of the

American Dream that they can continue to rely upon. In effect, Saund represents a brown character who obfuscates the black and white logics of oppression. He is incredibly appealing as the exception to the exception that proves the rule. We are doing our “best” he says, deferring the race question by way of his own example. He looks ahead to a postracial future that is not black or white but, outwardly, brown.

Bridge of Blood and Flesh

Unlike Mukerji, Saund achieves representation of brown character. In the final chapter of *Congressman from India*, he looks to “The Job Ahead” from the vantage of his political platform, as though realizing the union of India and America envisioned by Mukerji:

The era of colonialism has come to an end. Its death knell was sounded on the fifteenth day of August 1947, when India and Pakistan became independent nations. . . . The leaders of these revolutions were inspired by the same ideals that burned so fiercely in the hearts of the fathers of our own great republic.

The echo of the battle cries of American patriots, “No taxation without representation,” “Give me liberty or give me death,” may be heard in deepest Africa and in the ancient kingdoms of Asia and the Middle East.

The budding new nations growing out of the wreckage of colonial empires are one and all writing their constitutions on the American pattern. (*CFI*, 184-5)

Gone is Mukerji’s “cosmocentric” delay. India and the United States meet presently, with Saund positioned to be the harbinger of their union. He is the brown heir to the promise of American democracy, mediating the dichotomy of alienage and nativity with his successful naturalization. His address to the Indian parliament proposes “a close liaison between the two greatest democracies of the world, the Republic of India and the United States of America” (*CFI*, 181). This alliance is subtended by a revolutionary American genealogy whose “battle cries” resound across “budding new nations,” in some sense the fruit of Mukerji’s “seed continent.” In his own way, Saund becomes a child of the Ghadar movement who casts the new Indian national in the image of the American revolutionary. “The blaze started in 1776 in the United States of America has spread all over the world,” he confidently claims (*CFI*, 154).

This is a political genealogy that links revolutionary anticolonialism to the American revolution, India to the United States. In the crucible of the Cold War this linkage proves salutary. Saund need have no qualms (as Mukerji does) about bridging the gap between “East” and “West.” *Congressman from India* is the “inspiring autobiography of a man whose life is a vivid example of Democracy in action,” the original dust jacket proclaims. His life, as Saund retells it, neatly fits the “western idea of what a book ought to be.” In Shridharani’s memorable phrase from *My India, My America* (1941), Saund is able “to dream the American dream.”¹¹⁰

This dream of brown character obfuscates not only the realities of black subjugation in the United States but renders the Mexican immigrant ineluctably foreign. During his tenure as judge, Saund cleans up a local “den of vice” involving trafficked women from Mexico; working together with immigration authorities, he institutes stringent deportation measures to rid the town of Mexican migrants construed as undesirables who “drink, gamble, and visit the prostitutes” (*CFI*, 83,

88). Saund is concerned about the exploitation of Mexican immigrants under Public Law 78, an extension of the Bracero Program, but his appeal to the House Agriculture Committee involves “the farmers, small businessmen, Indians—all those directly and personally affected,” a list that does not include Mexican workers (*CFI*, 129). Although he will not countenance internal borders, writing in reference to the Dust Bowl migration that “it was inconceivable to me that an American would not be permitted to go wherever he pleased within the continental limits of the country,” the sanctity of national borders must be maintained (*CFI*, 56). Saund’s function as a congressional representative hinges on a defense of his constituency against the encroachments of the Mexican immigrant, who is positioned outside the bounds of the American polity.

It is noteworthy that the figure of the Punjabi Mexican is entirely elided in this context. Saund’s production of mixed identification will not even admit of the existence of this group, historically stigmatized for being “half-breeds” or “mestizos.”¹¹¹ The mixed racialization of the Punjabi Mexican cannot be reconciled with Saund’s marriage to a “Kosa from the West” that prefaces the text, whitening the prospects of the Indian immigrant. Much like Rihani in *Letters to Uncle Sam*, Saund attempts to cordon himself off from other immigrants who might also be racialized as brown (and therefore designated as consummately alien). Saund’s elisions recall the asymptotic relationship to whiteness palpable in Rihani’s eager anticipation of a union between his father and a “native daughter” of the United States, issuing an offspring with an unmistakably American (white, that is) face.

The mixed identifications of these Syrian and Indian immigrant writers are not to be confused with a happy hybridity. In fact, all four authors I discuss so far married white women. Like Saund, Rihbany frankly discloses his marriage to an “Aryan” woman in *A Far Journey*. Rihani married an artist, Bertha Case, in 1916, after the publication of *The Book of Khalid*. Mukerji was married to Ethel Ray Dugan by the time of *Caste and Outcast’s* publication (although he does not mention his 1918 marriage, perhaps because it might have fallen under the purview of anti-miscegenation laws).¹¹² A 1917 poem by Mukerji testifies to this particular instantiation of hybridity. Entitled “The Eurasian,” the poem is an apostrophe to the offspring of mixed European and Asian ancestry. It looks ahead to a future in which this claimant to “no country” might well come into his own:

Indignity your part today,
Suffering the guerdon of the gods;
No country to claim your own,
Nowhere to lay your head.
The ocean of ignorance separates us;
The snow-storm of commerce blinds the eye;
Yet you must stand true,
Bridge of blood and flesh between the West and East.
In ages to come, when
Man will love his brother,
Irrespective of birth and breed;
In the pantheon of the future, yours the immortal seat.
Son of man, you are brother!
Bearer of the cross of God!

Your destiny the lodestar of our epoch,
 Your life our rood-littered road of the Lord.
 Arise, awake, halt not
 Till the goal is reached;
 Raise high the Host of freedom
 Blare the trumpet of light.
 “Suffer you, for the world to rejoice”;
 “Die” so they “can live”;
 Live that you may bring the light
 To the meeting place of the West and East.¹¹³

The Orientalist union of “East” and “West” is the fruit of a particular mode of miscegenation—marriage into the white family. The Eurasian is a Whitmanian figure, heir to Columbia, evocative of the Superman of America, who bears the torch of a revolutionary genealogy. This vision of brown character entails a desire to be wed to whiteness. The “panethnic spirit” that critics find to be characteristic of Punjabi Mexicans is inassimilable to this vision of panethnicity.¹¹⁴ Put differently, there are shades of brownness at work here: tensions and contradictions that reveal the multiracial future of America to be far from an all-inclusive prospect.

The Syrian and Indian writers I consider in the first half of my dissertation enlist American power, progress, and glory—the staple expressions of U.S. exceptionalism—in the service of third world nationalism. Their mediation of the contradictions of black and white racialization by way of brown character is shaped by the fact that “America” can emerge as a creative site for anticolonialism, whose production is premised on the elision of U.S. neocolonialism. Saund dare not associate the Punjabi with the Mexican immigrant, a product of U.S. annexation who is nonetheless positioned perpetually outside the borders of the nation-state. The next chapter explores the production of mixed identification by immigrants who are also colonial subjects, embedded in the structures of “imported colonialism” within the United States.¹¹⁵ I shift within the comparative rubric of brown character from a transoceanic to a hemispheric topography, from an East-West dialectic shaped by British colonialism, to a North-South dialectic shaped by U.S. empire.

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1. Saint Nihal Singh, “The Picturesque Immigrant from India’s Coral Strand,” *Out West* 30 (1909): 43-44.
 2. Roger Adelson, *London and the Invention of the Middle East: Money, Power, and War, 1902-1922* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 24.
 3. Joan M. Jensen, *Passage From India: Asian Indian Immigrants in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 101.
 4. Herman Scheffauer, “The Tide of Turbans,” *Forum*, June 1910, 616.
 5. Vijay Mishra, *Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 2-3. I use the term “Indian” to designate immigration from British colonial India, which included the present nation-states of Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan.
 6. Arthur W. Helweg and Usha M. Helweg, *An Immigrant Success Story: East Indians in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 52. For an overview of census figures during this period, see Melendy, *Asians in*

America, 202-6, 225-6.

7. For more on this early South Asian immigration, generally Harold S. Jacoby, *History of East Indians in America: The First Half-Century Experience of Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims* (Amritsar, India: B. Chattar Singh Jiwan Singh, 2007); Lavina Dhingra Shankar and Pallassana R. Balgopal, "South Asian Immigrants before 1950: The Formation of Ethnic, Symbolic, and Group Identity," *Amerasia Journal* 27, no. 1 (2001): 55-85; Jensen, *Passage From India*; Bruce La Brack, *The Sikhs of Northern California, 1904-1975* (New York: AMS Press, 1988); and S. Chandrasekhar, ed. *From India to America: A Brief History of Immigration; Problems of Discrimination; Admission and Assimilation* (La Jolla, CA: Population Review, 1982).
8. Karen Isaksen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 30.
9. Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*, 63, 138-9.
10. Emily C. Brown, "Revolution in India: Made in America," in *From India to America: A Brief History of Immigration; Problems of Discrimination; Admission and Assimilation*, ed. S. Chandrasekhar (La Jolla, CA: Population Review, 1982), 41.
11. Jensen, *Passage From India*, 40, 45.
12. Jensen, *Passage From India*, 66. See also Melendy, *Asians in America*, 192.
13. Jensen, *Passage From India*, 141.
14. Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*, 10.
15. Jensen, *Passage From India*, 123.
16. Jensen, *Passage From India*, 39.
17. Ian Haney López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*, 10th anniversary ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 48. For an overview of the Indian racial prerequisite cases, see Appendix A of López's book.
18. Susan Koshy, "Category Crisis: South Asian Americans and Questions of Race and Ethnicity," *Diaspora* 7, no. 3 (1998): 294.
19. See generally Sandhya Shukla, *India Abroad: Diasporic Cultures of Postwar America and England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Rajini Srikanth, *The World Next Door: South Asian American Literature and the Idea of America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004); Antoinette Burton, *The Postcolonial Careers of Santha Rama Rau* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007). Shukla reads Saund and Shridharani's autobiographies in a postwar Indian diasporic context, opening up the fissures between nationalism and a complex, multinational diasporic imagination; Srikanth reads Saund and Mehta in terms of an inquiry into the "idea of America" as it is constituted and troubled by South Asian American literature of both Canada and the United States; and Burton positions Rau as a forerunner of the postcolonial diasporic critic, answering the demands of Cold War cosmopolitanism by producing knowledge about India for American consumption.
20. Note that South Asian literature has long been a staple of postcolonial studies, which has tended to read writers based in the U.S. under the rubric of diaspora in a broader North American, British, or Caribbean framing, focusing primarily on post-1965 writing. See, for instance, Malti Agarwal, ed. *English Literature: Voices of the Indian Diaspora* (New Delhi: Atlantic, 2009); Telugu Sireesha, *Diasporic Indian Women Writers: Quest for Identity in their Short Stories* (New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2009); K. Balachandran, ed. *Critical Essays on Diasporic Writings* (New Delhi: Arise, 2008); Mishra, *Literature of the Indian Diaspora*; Mitali P. Wong and Zia Hasan, *The Fiction of South Asians in North America and the Caribbean: A Critical Study of English-Language Works Since 1950* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004); Makarand Paranjape, ed. *In Diaspora: Theories, Histories, Texts* (New Delhi: Indialog, 2001); Anuradha Dingwaney Needham, *Using*

the Master's Tools: Resistance and the Literature of the African and South-Asian Diasporas (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000). For a useful overview of the increasing articulation of postcolonial and ethnic studies as it pertains to South Asians in the United States, see generally Anupama Jain, "Theorizing South Asian America: The Praxis of Locating Communities Locally and Globally," *South Asian Review* 24, no. 1 (2003): 220-36.

21. The text garners brief mentions in various histories of this period, including Jensen, *Passage From India*, 292n16; Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*, 203; Premdatta Varma, *Indian Immigrants in USA: Struggle for Equality* (New Delhi: Heritage, 1995), 12, 15, 151, 184.

22. Purnima Mankekar and Akhil Gupta, "The Homeless Self: Problems of Cultural Translation in Autobiography," in *Caste and Outcast*, ed. Gordon H. Chang et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 235.

23. Akhil Gupta, "Reincarnating Immigrant Biography: On Migration and Transmigration," in *Beyond Dichotomies: Histories, Identities, Cultures, and the Challenge of Globalization*, ed. Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi (Albany: Suny Press, 2002), 172, 180.

24. Mankekar and Gupta, "The Homeless Self," 234.

25. Mankekar and Gupta, "The Homeless Self," 234, 235.

26. Abraham Mitrie Rihbany, *A Far Journey: An Autobiography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), viii.

27. Dhan Gopal Mukerji, *Caste and Outcast* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 132 (hereafter cited in text as CO).

28. Kornel Chang, "Enforcing Transnational White Solidarity: Asian Migration and the Formation of the U.S.-Canadian Boundary," *American Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (September 2008): 672.

29. For more on this incident, see Jensen, *Passage From India*, 121-38.

30. Jensen, *Passage From India*, 222, 213. For more on the "German-Hindu conspiracy," see generally Giles T. Brown, "The Hindu Conspiracy, 1914-1917," *The Pacific Historical Review* 17, no. 3 (August 1948): 299-310; Don K. Dignan, "The Hindu Conspiracy in Anglo-American Relations during World War I," *The Pacific Historical Review* 40, no. 1 (February 1971): 57-76; Thomas G. Fraser, "Germany and Indian Revolution, 1914-18," *Journal of Contemporary History* 12, no. 2 (April 1977): 255-72; Joan M. Jensen, "The 'Hindu Conspiracy': A Reassessment," *The Pacific Historical Review* 48, no. 1 (February 1979): 65-83; Karl Hoover, "The Hindu Conspiracy in California, 1913-1918," *German Studies Review* 8, no. 2 (May 1985): 245-61; Matthew Erin Plowman, "Irish Republicans and the Indo-German Conspiracy of World War I," *New Hibernia Review* 7, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 80-105.

31. Jensen, *Passage From India*, 235; Harish K. Puri, *Ghadar Movement: Ideology Organisation and Strategy* (Amritsar: Guru Nank Dev University, 1993), 227.

32. Jensen, *Passage From India*, 258.

33. In 1925, Pakhar Singh murdered two white partners who cheated him of the harvest he had been forced to put under their names (Jensen, *Passage From India*, 267; Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*, 56). A grand jury in the Imperial Valley indicted sixty-five Indians in 1933 for conspiracy to evade the alien land laws, although the Supreme Court eventually found the conspiracy statute inapplicable in land cases (Jensen, *Passage From India*, 271).

34. Jensen, *Passage From India*, 172.

35. On the Ghadar movement, see generally Puri, *Ghadar Movement*. For more on Har Dayal, see Emily C. Brown, *Har Dayal: Hindu Revolutionary and Rationalist* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1975).

36. On Ghadar links to movements in Russia, China, Mexico, Ireland, and Egypt, see Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 207. For

a helpful overview of the transnational reach of the Indian independence movement and its affiliations with Irish nationalism, see generally Harald Fischer-Tiné, "Indian Nationalism and the 'World Forces': Transnational and Diasporic Dimensions of the Indian Freedom Movement on the Eve of the First World War," *Journal of Global History* 2 (2007): 325-44. Nationalists found allies in chapters of the Anti-Imperialist League as well as among some U.S. politicians, most notably Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, who published a strident critique of British rule in India in 1906 (Jensen, *Passage From India*, 19; Dignan, "The Hindu Conspiracy in Anglo-American Relations during World War I," 62, 64-5).

37. On Har Dayal's connections to radicals on the West Coast, see Hoover, "The Hindu Conspiracy in California, 1913-1918," 248; Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 65-6; and Jensen, *Passage From India*, 176. On Agnes Smedley's involvement in the East Coast independence movement, see Harold A. Gould, *Sikhs, Swamis, Students, and Spies: The India Lobby in the United States, 1900-1946* (New Delhi: Sage, 2006), 235-46.

38. Brown, *Har Dayal*, 141. For more on the convergence of immigrant and anticolonial struggle, see generally Mark Juergensmeyer, "The Gadar Syndrome: Ethnic Anger and Nationalist Pride," in *From India to America: A Brief History of Immigration; Problems of Discrimination; Admission and Assimilation*, ed. S. Chandrasekhar (La Jolla, CA: Population Review, 1982).

39. Darshan Singh Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora: Search for Statehood* (London: UCL Press, 1999), 98. For more on the Ghadar writings, see Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 136; Jensen, *Passage From India*, 186; and Jane Singh, "Echoes of Revolution: The Role of Literature in the Ghadar Movement" (Ph.D, University of California, Berkeley, 1990).

40. Gordon H. Chang, "The Life and Death of Dhan Gopal Mukerji," in *Caste and Outcast*, ed. Gordon H. Chang et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 8. Das came to the Bay Area in 1910 and worked to politicize the briefly active Friends of Hindustan, formed in September of that year to help support Indian students (Jensen, *Passage From India*, 173). Dayal arrived in Berkeley in 1911 and started lecturing part-time at Stanford later that year; he was very active during these years, organizing a "Nation Day" at the University of California, Berkeley in October 1912, making contacts with Sikh workers, and ultimately founding *Ghadar* in San Francisco in 1913 (Jensen, *Passage From India*, 175-183).

41. Chang, "The Life and Death of Dhan Gopal Mukerji," 6.

42. Jensen, *Passage From India*, 176, 181.

43. Jensen, *Passage From India*, 187-8. Don Dignan shows how Dayal was arrested more on American (rather than British) initiative, due to "his inflammatory speech at an anarchist meeting in San Francisco" (Dignan, "The Hindu Conspiracy in Anglo-American Relations during World War I," 61). On the federal anti-radical campaign from 1903 to 1933, see generally William Preston, *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

44. Chang, "The Life and Death of Dhan Gopal Mukerji," 12.

45. Chang, "The Life and Death of Dhan Gopal Mukerji," 12.

46. Chang, "The Life and Death of Dhan Gopal Mukerji," 4-5.

47. By the 1880s, a pan-Asian ideology had come to structure the relationship between India and Japan, promoting the idea of a common Asiatic racial and spiritual heritage. With Japan's victory, increasing numbers of Indian students coming to Tokyo for vocational training from 1900 to 1910, seeking to develop Indian nationalism on the model of Japan (Fischer-Tiné, "Indian Nationalism and the 'World Forces,'" 328-9). For an overview of the historical linkages between India and Japan, see Sushila Narasimhan, "India and Japan: Historical and Cultural Linkages," in *India and Japan in Search of Global Roles*, ed. Rajaram Panda and Yoo Fukazawa (New Delhi: Promilla, 2007). For more on the Indian nationalist movement in Japan, eventually leading to Japanese support of the Indian National Army during World War II, see T. R. Sareen, "India and Japan in Historical Perspective," in *India and Japan in Search of Global Roles*, ed.

- Rajaram Panda and Yoo Fukazawa (New Delhi: Promilla, 2007), 33-4, 40-3.
48. It is possible that his departure is shaped by a change in Japan's attitude to Indian nationalism: Japan agreed to extend its 1902 treaty with Britain in 1905, largely withdrawing its official support of Indian independence after this time (Jensen, *Passage From India*, 3, 165).
49. Chang, "The Life and Death of Dhan Gopal Mukerji," 5.
50. Mankekar and Gupta, "The Homeless Self," 236.
51. On the broader link between arguments about Oriental trade or civilizing Orientals and "visionary statements about completing Columbus's original mission," see Malini Johar Schueller, *U.S. Orientalisms: Race, Nation, and Gender in Literature, 1790-1890* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 9.
52. Ameen F. Rihani, *The Book of Khalid*, 6th ed. (Beirut, Lebanon: Librairie du Liban, 2000), 145.
53. Mikhail Naimy, *Kahlil Gibran: A Biography* (London: Quartet Books, 1988), 129; see also Suheil Bushrui and Joe Jenkins, *Kahlil Gibran: Man and Poet* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 3.
54. Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), x. On the Boston "romance of India," see Jensen, *Passage From India*, 14-15.
55. Melendy, *Asians in America*, 241; Jensen, *Passage From India*, 172; Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 41; Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*, 38-9. This sartorial flexibility was not lost on Indians: "Instances are not uncommon of Negroes donning a turban or an English accent to escape the prejudice which as American citizens they are made to suffer," one Indian visitor commented in a 1952 issue of the *Bombay Chronicle* (Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 42).
56. Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*, 13.
57. Srinivas Aravamudan, *Guru English: South Asian Religion in a Cosmopolitan Language* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 53-8.
58. Chang, "The Life and Death of Dhan Gopal Mukerji," 7.
59. Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, & U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*, Updated ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 22.
60. Schueller, *U.S. Orientalisms*, 173, 157.
61. Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*, 20, 42.
62. López, *White by Law*, 51.
63. Sarah M. A. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 76.
64. López, *White by Law*, 61, 104-5. For an overview of the "Aryan" myth and South Asian attachments to it, see generally Sucheta Mazumdar, "Race and Racism: South Asians in the United States," in *Frontiers of Asian American Studies: Writing, Research, and Commentary*, ed. Gail M. Nomura et al. (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1989), 25-38.
65. López, *White by Law*, 63.
66. "Hindus Too Brunette to Vote Here," *The Literary Digest*, March 10, 1923, 13.

67. López, *White by Law*, 64. In 1927, Sakaram Ganesh Pandit successfully prevented his denaturalization and effectively stopped denaturalization proceedings against Indians by taking the Supreme Court's argument further, arguing that "common knowledge," when the naturalization statute was originally ratified, would have taken Indians to be white (Helweg and Helweg, *An Immigrant Success Story*, 55; Jensen, *Passage From India*, 263).
68. López, *White by Law*, 65.
69. Jensen, *Passage From India*, 266.
70. Jensen, *Passage From India*, 83, 98.
71. Jensen, *Passage From India*, 214-6.
72. Jensen, *Passage From India*, 223, 224.
73. Malini Sood, "Expatriate Nationalism and Ethnic Radicalism: The Gadar Party in North America, 1910-1920" (Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1995), 11-2.
74. Jensen, *Passage From India*, 222.
75. Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 21.
76. Helweg and Helweg, *An Immigrant Success Story*, 51; Jensen, *Passage From India*, 239.
77. Chang, "The Life and Death of Dhan Gopal Mukerji," 18.
78. Chang, "The Life and Death of Dhan Gopal Mukerji," 26, 27. For more on the Mayo controversy, see generally Asha Nadkarni, "'World-Menace': National Reproduction and Public Health in Katherine Mayo's *Mother India*," *American Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (September 2008): 805-27.
79. Rihani, *The Book of Khalid*, 290.
80. Lawrence Buell, "Transcendentalist Literary Legacies," in *Transient and Permanent: The Transcendentalist Movement and Its Contexts*, ed. Charles Capper and Conrad Edick Wright (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1999), 614.
81. Chang, "The Life and Death of Dhan Gopal Mukerji," 21.
82. See Melendy, *Asians in America*, 235-6; Jensen, *Passage From India*, 280; Helweg and Helweg, *An Immigrant Success Story*, 56; Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*, 165-6; Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 271; Gould, *Sikhs, Swamis, Students, and Spies*, 315. Also see generally Varma, *Indian Immigrants in USA*, who often relies upon Saund's autobiography to document the rights struggle of Indian immigrants in the United States.
83. Shukla, *India Abroad*, 149, 146.
84. D. S. Saund, *Congressman from India* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1960), v (hereafter cited in text as *CFI*).
85. Susan Koshy, *Sexual Naturalization: Asian Americans and Miscegenation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 22.
86. Indians first arrived in the Imperial Valley in 1909 and built up a reputation for themselves as good workers and reliable borrowers as they increasingly leased large tracts of land; a 1919 census of land occupancy published by the state of California shows that Indians occupied over 32,000 acres in the Imperial Valley, part of a total of 88,000 acres in California as a whole (Jensen, *Passage From India*, 36-38). For more on Indian farmers in the Imperial Valley and California more broadly, see Karen Isaksen Leonard, *The South Asian Americans* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997), 43-5; and Melendy, *Asians in America*, 230-1.

87. Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*, 46.

88. Leonard, *The South Asian Americans*, 35. Some even took up new names in order to signify their “adoption of a new native place,” in Leonard’s words; Diwan Singh, for instance, added the name “Kasagrande” to his own, after the town of Casa Grande in Arizona, where he met his second wife (Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*, 170).

89. Leonard suggests that Saund “seemed only loosely connected to the Sikh networks” because he was of the Ramgarhia or artisan caste (Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*, 276-77n10). Ramgarhias were a minority among the “Jat-dominated migration to the Pacific Rim,” according to Gerald N. Barrier and Verne A. Dusenbery, eds. *The Sikh Diaspora: Migration and the Experience Beyond Punjab* (Delhi: Chanakya, 1989), 6.

90. For more on this ineligibility, see Melendy, *Asians in America*, 224.

91. Varma, *Indian Immigrants in USA*, 220, 292, 304. Varma clarifies that Saund was one of “five forces seeking relief for Indian immigrants. They included public opinion in India, Dr. Dalip Singh Saund’s associates in California, the India League of America in New York, the Government of India, and the United States Department of State” (302). Gould points out that Saund’s organization, the Indian National Congress Association of America on the West Coast, represented, along with the India Welfare League and the Indian Association for American Citizenship, “a grassroots constituency out there whose interests lay in achieving the hard currency of citizenship rights and immigration quotas, and not merely in philosophical abstractions about non-violence, the glories of Indian civilization and the evils of colonialism” (Gould, *Sikhs, Swamis, Students, and Spies*, 315; see also Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 271). Note that there is a discrepancy about the exactly name of Saund’s organization, which Saund gives in his autobiography as the “India Association of America” (*CFI*, 73).

92. Srikanth, *The World Next Door*, 239.

93. Srikanth, *The World Next Door*, 7.

94. I borrow this term from Harold Gould, who understands the “India Lobby” to be constituted by a “coterie of South Asians and their American supporters” who “acquired a considerable amount of media savvy and mastery of the art of the lobbying the US Congress and other agencies of government,” their activities beginning with the arrival of revolutionaries from India in the early twentieth century and ending with the achievement of Indian independence (Gould, *Sikhs, Swamis, Students, and Spies*, 18, 434). For more on the naturalization movement, see Melendy, *Asians in America*, 216-25; Jensen, *Passage From India*, 276-7.

95. Gould, *Sikhs, Swamis, Students, and Spies*, 401, 415.

96. Gould, *Sikhs, Swamis, Students, and Spies*, 399-400.

97. Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 128.

98. For more on the Ghadar movement in the postwar period, leading up to Indian independence, see Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 223-76.

99. Jensen, *Passage From India*, 232-45.

100. Puri, *Ghadar Movement*, 238-40.

101. Srikanth, *The World Next Door*, 240.

102. On Saund’s alleged ties to Ghadar being a “serious campaign issue, since Gadar had become linked with international communism,” see Juergensmeyer, “The Gadar Syndrome,” 54; see also Sood, “Expatriate Nationalism and Ethnic Radicalism,” 284. Sood points out that the California legislature investigated Ghadar in 1953 for “the purpose of ascertaining whether or not rumors that it was Communist-dominated were accurate” in relation to investigations into the Communist leadings of India itself (284-5). Thind also had to deny connections with Ghadar in the course of his

- court case (Jensen, *Passage From India*, 256).
103. Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, 98.
104. Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, 95, xv, 41.
105. Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*, 176.
106. Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 185.
107. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 58.
108. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 105. Dudziak points out that "Indian newspaper were particularly attuned to the issue of race discrimination in the United States" (33).
109. Srikanth, *The World Next Door*, 242.
110. Krishnalal Shridharani, *My India, My America* (New York: Halcyon House, 1943), 601.
111. Shankar and Balgopal, "South Asian Immigrants before 1950," 75-6. Early Mexican brides were labeled "Hindera," or Hindu lover, by other Mexicans even as Punjabi men were denounced by later South Asian immigrants for having married non-Punjabi women (Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices*, 209).
112. For a comprehensive overview of miscegenation laws by state, and their application to "Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, American Indians, native Hawaiians, and South Asians as well as Blacks and Whites," see Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6, 118; see also Koshy, *Sexual Naturalization*, 3, 8-9. Mukerji's marriage certificate lists his race as "Caucasian" and his residence as Syracuse, New York, perhaps to forestall possible objections and protect his identity (Chang, "The Life and Death of Dhan Gopal Mukerji," 11).
113. Dhan Gopal Mukerji, *Sandhya: Songs of Twilight* (San Francisco: Paul Elder and Company, 1917), 20.
114. Shankar and Balgopal, "South Asian Immigrants before 1950," 71.
115. Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 13.

Chapter 3

SPEAKING UNITED STATES

Stateside Writings of William Carlos Williams, José Garcia Villa, and José Antonio Villarreal

The title of this chapter references a little-known book by Pedro Juan Labarthe, entitled *The Son of Two Nations* (1931). It is a familiar Horatio-Alger account of Labarthe's immigration from Puerto Rico and his acculturation in the United States as he climbs "the staircase of success."¹ His new life lessons are not learned in school alone. When his scholarship is rescinded, Labarthe finds himself working in the stock room of a department store. He is bullied by Billy, an Irish immigrant. "Speak United States, will you?" Billy instructs Labarthe on one occasion as if to justify his harassment.² The irony is that Pedro is well-schooled in Americanism: a dutiful colonial subject, he has learned the platitudes of the American Dream from his American teacher in Puerto Rico and leaves for the United States as a self-styled "son of Two Nations," determined to "bringing a better understanding between the States, the Island and South America."³

But Pedro lacks racial awareness. "One day when he told one of them that he came from Porto Rico the student asked if he was pure white. Pedro looked at his hands wondering if by chance he had them black with dirt"; he is incomprehensible to the student, who thinks that "all the Porto Ricans are colored people."⁴ The fact that the student would read him in such black and white terms is also incomprehensible to Pedro. The only way he can identify as "black" is if his hands are dirty. In a characteristic instance of mixed identification, he identifies with whiteness even though he is not identified by the student as white.

The pan-Americanism of a figure like Labarthe is quite different from that of Cuban revolutionary José Martí, whose writings deal explicitly with U.S. dominance over the region. Martí's well-known essay, "Nuestra América" (1891) addresses itself to "our halfbreed America," the "present generation . . . showing the seed of the new America," that actively opposes itself to "the continent's fairskinned nation" by checking its expansionist ambition.⁵ This "seed" is not to be confused with Dhan Gopal Mukerji's uncertain germination of the American "seed continent;" rather, Martí issues a figurative call to arms that he would himself answer. I mention Martí as a point of contrast to Labarthe, to evoke a lineage of pan-Americanism with which we are more familiar. Indeed, Martí, with his ally in "Bronze Titan," Antonio Maceo, might be understood as the forebear of a revolutionary Americanism that found in the Chicano Movement a destiny for America in active opposition to the hegemony of the United States. Aztlán was figured as a new point of origination in this context, a utopian "Mestizo Nation" for a "Bronze People" with a "Bronze Culture."⁶ But it is the compromise represented by Labarthe that concerns me here: his reply to the injunction to "speak United States" which takes shape as a vexed, desirous, and problematic, albeit transnational, Americanism.

I trace the literary genealogy of these mixed identifications, focusing on the work of William Carlos Williams, José Garcia Villa, and José Antonio Villarreal and its emergence out of Puerto Rican, Filipino, and Mexican social formations. These writers share a common though nonidentical history of colonial subjection. Mexicans, Filipinos, and Puerto Ricans were part of a Hispanic new world united in opposition to Spanish rule, what Raúl Coronado has described as a "trans-Atlantic (or global, if we include the Philippines) Hispanic civil war."⁷ Whether as a consequence of the Mexican-American war, or the Spanish-American and Philippine-American wars, by which the

United States conquered territories previously under the domain of Spain, these groups developed a colonial relationship to the United States. In contrast to the Syrian and Indian writers I consider in Chapters 1 and 2, these are colonial subjects, to one extent or another part of diasporas generated by U.S. colonial ventures.

The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was a milestone in U.S. expansionism, which ceded almost one-third of Mexican territory to the United States, comprising present-day Arizona, California, Colorado, Kansas, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Utah, Texas, and Wyoming. Scholars have traced the subjection of Mexican Americans and Chicanos to this date, which established a “Conquered Generation” or “internal colony” within the United States, a generation that was subsequently shaped by the “economic conquest” of Mexico in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁸ As Mae Ngai points out, Mexican immigration to the United States is shaped by “a kind of ‘imported colonialism’ that was a legacy of the nineteenth-century American conquest of Mexico’s northern territories.”⁹ The 1898 Treaty of Paris would bring the Philippines and Puerto Rico under U.S. imperial control, consolidated by the Philippine-American War following. Rudyard Kipling penned “The White Man’s Burden” (1899) in this context, wryly urging the United States to shoulder the weight of imperialism. With the consolidation of U.S. hegemony over Mexico to the South “American writers even suggested the need for a Rudyard Kipling to capture the exact sense of the relations that they observed,” writes Gilbert González.¹⁰

Mexican, Filipino, and Puerto Rican immigrants had tenuous claims to a brotherhood racialized as “brown,” constituting the vexed family of U.S. empire. Part of an archive of literature that produced the “Mexican Problem” for American audiences in the early twentieth century, a 1926 article entitled “The Little Brown Brother Treks North” depicted an “army” of Mexicans crossing the border.¹¹ González points out that “the term ‘Brown Brother,’ used by several writers in reference to migrants, was never meant to imply brotherhood; on the contrary, its use implied a kind of paternalistic racial whimsy.”¹² Filipinos were famously referred to as “little brown brothers” by William Howard Taft in what became a ubiquitous formulation of imperialist paternalism.¹³ “As a father is bound to guide his son, Americans were charged with the development of native others,” Vicente Rafael writes, showing how the “allegory of benevolent assimilation effaces the violence of conquest.”¹⁴ The derogation of Filipinos as “brown” made its way into a diasporic context. Yen Le Espiritu’s ethnography of Filipino immigrants reveals the extent to which this racialization shaped their personal histories, particularly those of the pioneering Pinoys. For instance, A. B. Santos who immigrated in 1922 refers to his “inferiority complex—being short, and very brown, and very Filipino.”¹⁵ In a little-known memoir entitled, *I Have Lived with the American People* (1948), Manual Buaken describes being turned away as a prospective tenant because “the place was not meant to be occupied by ‘monkeys’ like us. . . . it was only because of our brown skins that we were not wanted.”¹⁶ Documentation issued by the New York Office of Employment and Identification indicates that Puerto Ricans also identified themselves as “brown,” among other choices: “‘dark,’ ‘light,’ ‘ruddy,’ ‘olive,’ ‘regular,’ ‘brown,’ ‘light brown,’ and ‘dark brown.’”¹⁷

In effect, these immigrants were neither black nor white, neither citizen nor alien. They occupied the contradictory position of foreign nationals within the United States. A landmark 1897 ruling, *In re Rodriguez*, revealed these contradictions even as it affirmed the right of Mexican immigrants to naturalize. The court had difficulty reading the figure of the petitioner, Ricardo Rodriguez. In the words of the District Court Judge, “as to color, he may be classed with the copper-colored or red men. He has dark eyes, straight black hair, and high cheek bones” although he “knows

nothing of the Aztecs or Toltecs” and is therefore “not an Indian.”¹⁸ Rodriguez abutted different racial categories (most perceptibly that of the “Indian”), but the court was nonetheless obliged by treaty to find him to be eligible to naturalize. This “pure-blooded Mexican” applicant was admitted to citizenship despite the fact that, according to the court, “he would probably not be classed as white” by the racial pseudo-science of the period.¹⁹ Katherine Benton-Cohen’s characterization of those who bore the brunt of the 1917 Bisbee Deportation is apt here: “*borderline Americans*, because most were U.S. residents but not citizens . . . but also because, to many local residents, men like the deportees had at best a tenuous claim on whiteness.”²⁰ These “borderline Americans” were not quite citizens and not quite white. At the same time, however, they claimed whiteness and other privileges of citizenship that were intertwined from the Naturalization Act of 1790 onwards and further conjoined in the crucible of U.S. empire.

Mexicans within the annexed territories were guaranteed the rights of U.S. citizenship and legally constructed as white. Ngai points out that “Mexicans were thus deemed to be white for purposes of naturalization, an unintended consequence of conquest.”²¹ “It was possible, in other words, to be both white *and* Mexican in the United States,” as Benton-Cohen notes.²² Juridical citizenship did not necessarily lead to social citizenship. As David Gutiérrez points out, the “race problem” of the American southwest, entailed in the annexation of a population deemed primitive and barbaric, resulted in the disenfranchisement of Mexicans on every level; “the ethnic Mexican population of the region was slowly but surely relegated to an inferior, caste-like status in the region’s evolving social system.”²³ “Anglos” were distinguished from “Mexicans” and the privileges of whiteness arrogated increasingly to immigrants from southern and eastern Europe.²⁴ In this context, Mexicans defined the terms of their own whiteness where possible. Some professed a Latin or Spanish American heritage, claiming to be descended from “the first white race” of the new world.²⁵ Julie Weise shows how this “Caucasian strategy” was supplemented by another “Faustian pact” in New Orleans and the rural south, where Mexican immigrants pursued “the strategy of eliding the question of biological race and focusing instead on cultural whitening.”²⁶ On the other hand, a new conception of “La Raza” arose out of a combination of racism, nativism, and segregationist violence, producing a pan-Hispanic consciousness and presaging the subsequent development of Chicanismo.²⁷

Filipinos and Puerto Ricans faced similar crises of assimilation as they immigrated to the United States impelled by colonial and neocolonial intervention. Although they were decried as the “‘third invasion’ from the Orient” on the West Coast, Filipinos did not fit the purview of Asiatic exclusion before them, which had targeted Chinese and Japanese (and even Indian) immigrants in turn.²⁸ As colonial subjects, Filipinos and Puerto Ricans were classified as “U.S. nationals,” neither citizen nor alien but possessing freedom of movement within the United States. Their liminality was adjudicated by the Insular Cases which found the newly acquired colonial territories (Guam among them) to be “unincorporated,” effectively limiting the constitutional rights of their inhabitants. The Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 paved the way for Philippine independence under terms grossly favorable to the United States, deeming Filipino immigrants to be aliens who would henceforth be subject to deportation and coerced repatriation and be denied reentry. It was not until independence was achieved in 1946 that Filipinos were able to naturalize.²⁹ The rights of Puerto Rican immigrants were also tied to the colonial status of Puerto Rico. The Jones Act of 1917 granted limited self-governance to Puerto Rico and conferred U.S. citizenship on all Puerto Ricans. The growing Puerto Rican immigration to the United States was “foreign in a domestic sense,” as Lorrin Thomas

suggests, adapting a 1901 description of Puerto Rico by a Supreme Court justice in order to point out that “*Puerto Rican* and *citizen* fit together only when mediated by the United States.”³⁰ Gary Okihiro shows how the racialization of both groups advanced the “colonizing mission to reconstitute whiteness, manliness, and the nation-state in the face of nonwhiteness, womanliness, and the inchoate assembly of natives utterly unfit for self-government.”³¹

And yet both Filipinos and Puerto Ricans claimed to be Americanized by their enforced colonial tutelage. Filipinos, for instance, believed themselves to be “more Americanized than European immigrants.”³² As one brochure issued by the Office of Puerto declared, Puerto Ricans “are not immigrants, but American citizens on the move”; their “‘Mayflower’ is the modern airplane” and “even before they find a Plymouth Rock for themselves, they are Americans.”³³ As Ian Haney López points out, the Chicano and Young Lord movements were the exception rather than the rule, “among the few historical episodes during which large groups rejected a White identity and instead embraced non-Whiteness.”³⁴

In this respect, I think the gap between these immigrants and Asian America can be further clarified. There is no doubt an overlap here, in the case of Filipinos implicated with “Yellow Peril” and the less familiar imperialist Orientalism directed toward Mexico (perceived in a 1911 account to be comprised of “brown-skinned and yellow-skinned races, and their hybrids” who “descend from Oriental bloods”).³⁵ The strategy of “cultural whitening” that Weise discovers among Mexicans in New Orleans is also reminiscent of the grounds upon which Takao Ozawa defended his eligibility for naturalization in 1923, citing the superior cultural assimilability of Japanese immigrants.³⁶ But these subjects of U.S. empire are not paradigmatically Asian American: “always seen as an immigrant, as the ‘foreigner-within’” in Lisa Lowe’s seminal theorization; or charted as superior foreigners against white and black Americans in Claire Jean Kim’s triangulation.³⁷ These colonial subjects represent an uncanny foreignness: an alien familiarity that is also loosely familial. In Ngai’s words, if “nativists believed Chinese and Japanese were unassimilable because they were radically *different* from Euro-Americans, both racially and culturally, they were discomfited precisely by the extent of Filipinos’ Americanization.”³⁸

Critics have already pointed out the vexed status of Filipino American literary and cultural production within an Asian American studies framework. E. San Juan, Jr. notes that the “chief distinction of Filipinos from other Asians residing in the United States is that their country of origin was the object of violent colonization and unmitigated subjugation by U.S. monopoly capital”; the “Filipino in the United States is . . . understandable neither as Filipino alone nor as American alone but as an articulation of the political, social, economic, and cultural forces of the two societies with their distinct colliding, if amalgamative, histories.”³⁹ Oscar Campomanes points out that “the Philippines is the only Asian country of origin to have been subjected to a sustained and systematic American experiment in extraterritorial colonial rule,” suggesting that the “Filipino Americanization can, in fact, be understood as a function of U.S. colonialism” and “the term ‘Filipino American’ can be thus recharged, instead of the conventional problematic of immigrant hyphenation.”⁴⁰ Allan Punzalan Isaac clearly explains the distinction between the quintessential Asian American subject (characterized in Lowe’s foundational work by “alienated citizenship” or “disavowed citizenship”) and Filipino “*noncitizen nonaliens*.”⁴¹ This is a status Filipinos share with other U.S. colonials, peoples who comprise what Isaac configures as the “American Tropics, marking U.S. territories in and adjacent to the torrid zone.”⁴² Recapitulating broader debates within the field of Asian American studies that point to the instability of Asian Americanness itself, Isaac argues that the “ambivalent

'inclusion' of the Filipino American in the U.S. polity as an American 'national' reveals the contradictions in a political belonging founded on social domination."⁴³

The writings I consider in this chapter are shaped by this shared history of social domination. They are both inside and outside, incorporated into yet abjected from the bounds of U.S. empire—stateside in insofar as they speak United States from a literal and figurative remove. In the first section, I explore the figure of the dark woman within Williams's work, building up to *Yes, Mrs. Williams* (1959), his biography of his mother. I ask what it might mean to read Williams's insistent Americanism as a mode of majoritarian identification on the part of a minority writer (who has recently been identified as a second-generation Puerto Rican). The second section turns to a short story cycle from Villa's *Footnote to Youth* (1933), which stages the protagonist's rebirth in a New Mexican desert. Literally dogged by the stigma of race, Villa's brown character seeks refuge from racialization in a transcendent, metaphysical realm. I close by reading Villarreal's bildungsroman, *Pocho* (1959) and its figuration of the Americanized Mexican. In my view, Richard Rubio is not an individualist but a universalist, whose impossible desire to be part of everything exemplifies the manic identifications of brown character.

Elena's Williams

Williams has long been held out as the new world's retort to the traditionalists of the old world, those expatriates who shamelessly took up Latin and Greek, looking backward to Europe and England for the fount of Anglo-America. "He was an American original," Webster Schott writes in his introduction to *Imaginations* (1970), a collection of the author's early work.⁴⁴ Nowhere in this introduction does Schott make mention of Williams's ethnicity or race. If ever there were doubts as to his identifications, they are dissolved in the glare of Williams's canonical status as a literary great. Williams is hailed as an authentic "American," an image that he himself took pains to propagate. As he writes in "The Great American Novel" (1923), "I am a beginner. I am an American. A United Stateser" (*IM*, 175).

In recent years, Williams's provenance has been the subject of critical investigation. "Today Williams would be called 'Latino,'" Peter Schmidt points out.⁴⁵ Michael North has already traced the contours of Williams's "racial masquerade," "his slantwise relationship to the linguistic world around him" not to mention his appropriative identifications with "a collective of outcasts," whether indigenous or African American; he points out that Williams's contemporaries often attributed the strangeness of his work to his alien and mixed race background (he was "'minor' because he remained 'alien' to the great American background, a 'primitive' lost in a great uncharted territory").⁴⁶ Lisa Sánchez González situates Williams alongside Arturo Schomburg as part of a "Boricua cultural intellectual history," reading Williams's work in the context of a broader Hispanic Caribbean and Latin American modernism and postcolonialism.⁴⁷ I build upon these accounts, exploring Williams's "slantwise relationship" to American letters by reading his work in a comparative ethnic context. What if Williams's insistence on producing a distinctly American idiom, against the depredations of Europe, is not just a reaction to T. S. Eliot or Ezra Pound but a mode of mixed identification, a claim to majoritarian identity by a minority subject? I look at the figure of the dark woman in *Kora in Hell* (1920) and *Spring and All* (1923), as well as *In the American Grain* (1925), building up to his characterization of his mother, Raquel Ellen Rose Hoheb (or "Elena" for short) in *Yes, Mrs. Williams*. Elena is at once productive of and consumed by Williams's

Americanism. Williams paradoxically celebrates the mixture of races his mother represents, while at the same time incorporating her into his manic vision of himself as a “United Stateser.”

In his “Prologue” to *Kora in Hell*, Williams excoriates critics who would elevate Eliot’s “Prufrock” to anything like the status of “a New World type”; he offers Montezuma or Guatemozin in his stead, answering the “Love Song” with the lullaby of the “Adobe Indian hag” (*IM*, 24-5). But he does not shy away from printing a letter by Pound which calls into question Williams’s claim to adjudicate Americanness:

And America? What the h—I do you a blooming foreigner know about the place. Your *père* only penetrated the edge, and you’ve never been west of Upper Darby, or the Maunchunk switchback.

Would H., with the swirl of the prairie wind in her underwear, or the Virile Sandburg recognize you, an effete easterner as a REAL American? INCONCEIVABLE!!!!

My dear boy you have never felt the woop of the PEEraries. You have never seen the projecting and protuberant Mts. of the Sierra Nevada. WOT can you know of the country?

You have the naive credulity of a Co. Clare emigrant. But I (*der grosse Ich*) have the virus, the bacillus of the land in my blood, for nearly three bleating centuries. . . .

You thank your bloomin gawd you’ve got enough Spanish blood to muddy up your mind, and prevent the current American ideation from going through it like a blighted colander.

The thing that saves your work is opacity, and don’t forget it. Opacity is NOT an American quality. (*IM*, 11)

In this blustering letter, Pound identifies Williams as profoundly un-American and all the better for it. He contrasts Williams’s “Spanish blood” with his own reliable Puritan stock and windblown prairie roots. He has some apprehension of the latter’s biography, his position as a second-generation Puerto Rican immigrant in the United States. Born in England, but raised in the Dominican Republic, Williams’s father merits only a foreign appellation (“*père*”). His mother was born in Puerto Rico to a family that had lived there for generations. Williams was named for his uncle Carlos Hoheb (a prominent physician in Puerto Rico) and grew up in a multilingual household in which Spanish and French were spoken in preference to English. This genealogy of “Spanish blood” is “muddy,” according to Pound, giving rise to a salutary “opacity” in Williams’s work.

Pound goes on in the letter to quote a treatise on “*Cosmopolitisme*” in the French original, painting a grim picture of love of country (“*amour excessif d’une patrie*”) gone awry (*IM*, 12). The translation is as follows: “Not only is one afraid to let go of his mother’s apron strings, to go and see how other men live, to join in their struggles, to share their labors, not only does one stay at home, but he ends up by shutting his door.”⁴⁸ Williams could not have missed Pound’s jibe at his relationship with his mother, but he is nonplussed by it. In fact, the “Prologue” begins from the perspective of his mother in a “dark mood,” “a despoiled, molted castaway” who “by this power still breaks life between her fingers” (*IM*, 8). She is progenitor and progeny of Williams’s complex imagination. It is as though Williams’s self-definition is inseparable from his matrilineal attachments, not to his mother alone (as Pound alleges) but to what his mother represents: the mother line, the “Spanish blood” that she bequeaths him. It is precisely this lineage that opens the door to Williams’s

excessive patriotism—his manic Americanism that sets about incorporating all the Americas into the United States.

Williams quite literally muddies up his early work. It is hard not to see the resemblance between his characterization of “Prufrock, the nibbler at sophistication, endemic in every capital” and the personage of Pound, with whom Williams continually argues: “I contended for bread, he for caviar” (*IM*, 24, 26). Williams seeks the counterpart of this dandy, this Old World flâneur. In opposition to the perceived Eurocentrism and Anglo-Americanism of his literary peers, he crafts himself as a poet-farmer, unafraid to dig into the new world. “*A poem can be made of anything*,” he goes on to demonstrate in the body of the text, thus explaining one of his “Improvisations”: “*This is a portrait of a disreputable farm hand made out of the stuff of his environment*” (*IM*, 70). The “portrait” is as follows: “There is neither onyx nor porphyry on these roads—only brown dirt. . . . Walk in the curled mudcrusts to one side, hands hanging” (*IM*, 70). The well-known imagery of *Spring and All* makes an advance appearance here in the muddy landscape of *Kora in Hell*. Williams gets his hands dirty, as though hearkening to Pound’s advice.

In *Spring and All* we find a proliferation of muddy tropes: “brownd trees,” “broad, muddy fields / brown with dried weeds,” “small trees / with dead, brown leaves under them,” and “the artist figure of / the farmer” staring at the “cold wind” in “the brownd weeds” (*IM*, 52, 95, 99). Dirt and decay are the source of the new spring, posed as a challenge to the mincing and snobbish figure of Prufrock. “Reproduction lets death in, says Joyce. Rot, say I” (*IM*, 74). Not only is Joyce’s comment “rot” in Williams’s estimation, but “rot” is imbricated with reproduction, with the advent of spring and ultimately the poetry itself. In another gloss, Williams points out that filth is a great leveler of class distinctions: “*Filth and vermin though they shock the over-nice are imperfections of the flesh closely related in the just imagination of the poet to excessive cleanliness. After some years of varied experience with the bodies of the rich and the poor a man finds little to distinguish between them, bulks them as one and bases his working judgments on other matters*” (*IM*, 46). It is precisely this “shock” that Williams counterposes to the “over-nice” figure cut by Eliot and Pound. This is his retort to their betrayal: an abject new world, filthy, verminous, rotten, and muddy, but nonetheless fecund with creative possibility.

This muddy landscape becomes increasingly tied to ideas of racial purity and impurity, and ultimately to the figure of the dark woman with which the text closes. If Williams’s style is “muddy” it is because of his “Spanish blood,” as Pound suggests. Muddying, in this instance, is a function of sexuality, of ancestry, and ultimately *mestizaje* itself. “To Elsie” famously begins, “The pure products of America / go crazy” (*IM*, 131). Elsie, “with a dash of Indian blood,” is held out as a salvation for America (*IM*, 132). Through her, the “pure products of America” find expression of “the truth about us”: “as if the earth under our feet / were / an excrement of some sky / and we degraded prisoners / destined / to hunger until we eat filth” (*IM*, 132-33). Impurity is linked to Elsie’s embodiment. The poem suggests that the “pure products of America” are crazed with a purity that is ultimately impure—“isolate flecks,” perhaps of “filth” or “excrement” (*IM*, 133). The text closes with another Elsie-like figuration:

Black eyed susan
rich orange
round the purple core

the white daisy
is not
enough

Crowds are white
as farmers
who live poorly

But you
are rich
in savagery—

Arab
Indian
dark woman (*IM*, 151)

The dark woman is rich in precisely what the crowds lack: savagery. “Poorly” might well be read as “purely” inasmuch as the crowds are “pure products”—unlike Elsie with her “Indian blood,” unlike the “Arab” or “Indian” woman. Perhaps she is modeled on Scheherazade (who makes an earlier appearance), or the “Gipsy” who smiles enigmatically in advance of Williams’s legendary wheelbarrow:

XXI

one day in Paradise
a Gipsy

smiled
to see the blandness

of the leaves—
so many

so lascivious
and still

XXII

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens (*IM*, 137-8)

The Gipsy gazes across the dash, transforming the “blandness” of the leaves into a “lascivious” stillness. This gaze carries across the two poems, which are part of a longer progression that maintains its linear numbering despite various prose interjections. The poems are meant to be read in sequence. For the Gipsy’s gaze heightens the urgency of the red wheelbarrow. In effect, “so much depends” on the galvanizing gaze of this dark woman.⁴⁹ She facilitates the scope of Williams’s idea of America and his relationship to this idea.

In the American Grain cultivates this idea, muddying up Williams’s Americanness (per Pound’s counsel). In effect, Williams presents the prehistory of a “United Stateser” whose provenance is the entire new world. He offers the clearest statement of his mandate in the longest section of the book, “Père Sebastian Rasles,” which stages his conversations with French writer Valéry Larbaud. “Americans have lost the sense, being made up as we are, that what we are has its origin in what *the nation* in the past has been; that there is a source in America for everything we think or do,” Williams writes.⁵⁰ He is searching for the “source” of America, for America’s roots: “I speak only of sources. I wish only to disentangle the obscurities that oppress me, to track them to the root and to uproot them” (*AG*, 116). He will show Americans who “float without question” what they “will not see”: “that what they are is growing on these roots” (*AG*, 113). These roots grow in places as varied as Tenochtitlán, Kentucky, and Québec. To be sure, this is a “nativist poetic,” as Walter Benn Michaels has argued, explaining how Williams is interested in cementing an American “*identitarianism*.”⁵¹ But the nativity Williams produces is larger than that of the United States. He constructs a transnational archive, as critics have pointed out, troubling “the teleological North American notion of the nation-state,” in the words of González.⁵² In effect, Williams finds the roots proper to a “United Stateser” whose provenance is the hemispheric new world. *In the American Grain* represents the archive of his majoritarian identification—his manic Americanism.

The dark woman figures prominently in this archive. In Schmidt’s words, Williams stages a “Colonial Romance,” involving “a meeting between a white male and a darker-skinned woman who represents another, an Other, culture,” that even as it seeks to reject Eurocentrism represents “one of the oldest clichés of European thought, that the New World exists to allow the Old to regenerate itself.”⁵³ The essays in *In the American Grain* sympathize with figures who give themselves over to this encounter: Hernando de Soto who conjoins a feminized New World (“*She—It is I*”); Sir Walter Raleigh who “became—America!” “on the body of his Queen”; Père Sebastian Rasles “with his beloved savages”; Daniel Boone seeking “to be *himself* in a new world, Indianlike”; or Samuel Houston who “joined the Cherokee Indians” (*AG*, 51, 60, 120, 137, 212). Jacataqua of “mixed French and Indian blood” greets Howard and Burr with “a wave of her brown hand” (*AG*, 186, 187). Williams privileges figures who allow themselves to be seduced by this gesture. At the other extreme are Cotton Mather and his consorts, who contravene the colonial romance: “the flower of that religion, that unreasonable thing, on which they prided themselves for its purity. That is, its rigid clarity, its *inhuman* clarity” (*AG*, 111). “To Elsie,” comes to mind: these are the “pure products of America.” And the new world is not theirs to originate. Puritanism represents a defunct rootstock.

“All that will be new in America will be anti-Puritan. It will be of another root,” Williams writes, celebrating the traverses of impurity (*AG*, 120).

“Going native” takes on a new logic when compared to the Indian and Syrian examples, as this history makes a claim upon indigeneity itself. The figure of Jacataqua is all but erased: “dead Indians” of whom “almost nothing remains . . . but a memory” (*AG*, 74, 157). Michaels has historicized this fantasy of the “Vanishing Indian” as part of a moment that transformed American citizenship from an achievement into an inheritance.⁵⁴ In González’s words, “Williams wants to have his authentic American Indian (as a metaphor for America) and to eat her/him too.”⁵⁵ González also points out the “nearly complete elision of Africans and slavery in the exposition of colonial transamerican history.”⁵⁶ The one treatment of slavery in the book, “Advent of the Slaves,” is a discomfiting, primitivist account that is not tempered by even the rudimentary historicity that Williams accords Native Americans within the text. At best, blackness is figured as “a racial irreducible minimum” within the text (*AG*, 209). More often, we are given a blank. “When they try to make their race an issue—it is nothing,” Williams writes, this “*NOBODY*” or “nothing, nothing” coming to be a strange refrain (*AG*, 209, 211). As North points out, referencing the figure of Diada within the text, “African Americans served as symbols of some all-encompassing psychic health and simultaneously as ciphers of total lack.”⁵⁷ In the dark woman, Williams finds “one of his most persistent symbols of America” according to North: “preferably black or American Indian, bathed in filth.”⁵⁸ This history of the Americas by a “United Stateser” is founded upon a gendered and racialized act of erasure, itself an allegory for Puerto Rican incorporation into the United States.

In *Yes, Mrs. Williams*, the dark woman finds a new incarnation in the form of Williams’s mother Elena. One scene from the biography describes Williams and his brother playing in the yard while “*the mother leaned upon the balustrade of the balcony*”: “*There above them, as they played, leaned nothing of America, but Puerto Rico, a foreign island in a tropical sea of earlier years—and Paris of the later Seventies.*”⁵⁹ She looms large over Williams’s recollections and his work in general, despite Pound’s epistolary caution. Like the other dark women of Williams’s work, she is productive of and consumed by his Americanism. There is “nothing of America” in her; instead she represents Puerto Rico and Paris—different places in a different time. Williams celebrates these eclectic associations while at the same time incorporating his mother into his all-encompassing vision of himself as a “United Stateser.” *Yes, Mrs. Williams* is as much an autobiography as it is a biography. It is “a personal record of my mother,” as Williams declares in the subtitle, staking out a possessive claim to his matrilineal patrimony.

The impurity that Williams venerates in his other writings is manifest in the figure of Mrs. Williams as well. Her provenance becomes something of a refrain in *Yes, Mrs. Williams*:

In the West Indies, in Martinique, St. Thomas, Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo, in those days, the races of the world mingled and intermarried—imparting their traits one to another and forgetting the orthodoxy of their ancient and medieval views. It was a good thing. It is in the best spirit of the New World. (*MW*, 30)

All the races of the earth mingled in the West Indies. There were the Luchetties, the Gordons, the Wingwoods, the Bryans, the Monsantos, the Kruegers, the Hurrards, the Hazels. . . . It was not only a fact, it was at its best a revolution! a revolution of sentiment and, through that, of the intelligence. . . .

While it lasted—too lovely to last long—it threw its light not far enough over the world, but there was light there and in this light she grew up—tolerance, the breakdown of old rigidities. It was precisely this that the West Indian tradition tended to break down—traditions they had left behind, simply didn't know any more. This was its good." (MW, 35)

In the West Indies, in St. Thomas, Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo—the races of the world mingled and intermarried—imparting their traits one to another and forgetting the orthodoxy of their ancient and medieval view . . .

Yet the races mingled with man and woman sensing the new in superb disregard for tradition which, indeed, they had left behind, simply didn't know any more. (MW, 135-36)

Elena's lineage is described in the terms of a hemispheric discourse of *mestizaje*. She represents the revolutionary mingling of the world's races. The importance of the figure of the mother is not to be underestimated in Williams's work, as a 1946 statement of his poetics indicates. Pound (by now in prison) tends in Williams's estimation to "strike back toward the triumphant forms of the past, father to father. No mother necessary."⁶⁰ Williams, on the other hand, moulds his art from society itself, "that supplying female," "his sources," lone defense against "literary sterility."⁶¹ The dark woman, and her avatar in Elena, is the source of Williams's newness. The "new world" is her bounty, both geographically and formally—signifying the new *word* of Williams's creation. Williams's manic Americanism is her bequest.

Not unsurprisingly, Elena is also on the verge of death. This is literally the case, as the biography treats of Williams's mother in her old age: "a small woman with straggling white hair, clumsy hands, lame, extremely deaf and only recently recovered from the removal of cataracts from both eyes" (MW, 24). But Williams also attributes an exaggerated decrepitude to his mother, describing her at the extremity of abjection:

Neither one thing or the other, grotesques were drawn on the walls of grottos, half human, half leaves—whatever the fancy made obligatory to fate. So in her life, neither one or the other, she stands bridging two cultures, three regions of the world, almost without speech—her life spent in that place completely out of her choice almost, to her, as the Brogbignigans to Gulliver. So gross, so foreign, so dreadful, to her obstinate spirit, that has neither submitted nor mastered, leaving her in a néant of sounds and sense—Only her son, the bridge between herself and a vacancy as of the sky at night, the terrifying emptiness of non-entity. (MW, 94)

Elena is attributed nothingness, reminiscent of the treatment of the dark woman in *In the American Grain*. There is no "supplying" plenitude here, only dread and decay. Her own creative impulses are degenerative, as Williams confirms, printing his mother's poem within the text. In Williams's translation (from the Spanish original) the speaker watches "the dried leaves / of the inexorable Autumn" from her window as they "fall"; she looks ahead to a "radiant Springtime" but realizes that these are "lost illusions" for the leaves "will not relive," "they are dead in the / Winter of human life" (MW, 123). This is the "fall" of Elena's life. By her own admission, she is "the last of the Mohicans" (MW, 51). She becomes the doomed incarnation of the "Vanishing Indian" from *In the American Grain*. What remains midst the "néant of sounds and sense" that she occupies? "Only her son, the

bridge.” The dark woman is spent but her progeny endures—the outcome of her seemingly inexorable decline.

There is a strange and poignant irony here. For Williams is aware that his mother “is about to pass out of the world,” and he resolves therefore to “speak from now on about my mother, as if my mother were still living,” even going to far as to describe her as his “*Contemporary*” at one point (*MW*, 24, 23, 60). But his descriptions serve only to confirm her obsolescence. What ultimately saves Elena from oblivion is a “scheme” that Williams hits upon midway through the text (*MW*, 25). Mother and son begin to translate a book by Francisco de Quevedo from Spanish into English (a book that is coincidentally a gift from Pound). At first, Williams presents this as a device of necessity, a way of keeping his mother occupied after a debilitating fracture limits her mobility. But it soon turns out that this is the “scheme” for the biography itself: “There it is. Let that be the scaffolding. I’ll speak of all these things as if she told them to me while we were translating—only the pretext: the real story is how all the complexities finally came to play one tune, today—to me—what I find good in my own life” (*MW*, 26). This is a “story turning about a story,” in his words, with a “pretext” of immediacy: “I shall make it seem as if she told me her life while we were working over the translation, then as if we looked up from that work, speak as if she were telling me about herself” (*MW*, 28). Conversations that he has recorded intermittently over time (“on any piece of scrap paper . . . so as to preserve the flavor and the accurate detail”) he renders as though they are presently occurring (*MW*, 23). The second half of *Yes, Mrs. Williams* exemplifies this conceit, as we move from Williams’s narration to a composite text, described as an “account taken from my mother’s conversation,” which is interspersed with Williams’s own commentary (*MW*, 39). We are given little snippets in his mother’s voice, ranging from Puerto Rican aphorisms to childhood memories to detailed accounts of her family genealogy. These are framed by the scene of translation that structures the entire text.

Although Williams insists that this is only “pretext,” we never quite see the “real story” as he intends it: “how all the complexities finally came to play one tune.” Allowing Elena to speak, *Yes, Mrs. Williams* accords a measure of agency to dark woman. “I never wanted to come to America,” Elena clearly says, voicing the antithesis of Williams’s manic Americanism (*MW*, 96). The incorporation of the “dark woman” by the “United Stateser” reaches a limit in translation. “One is forced on the conception of the New World as a woman,” Williams writes in *In the American Grain*, an observation that is strangely fulfilled as he takes on his mother’s voice (*AG*, 220). Not only is he forced to conceive of the New World as a woman, he is forced to conceive the New World *as a woman*. Indeed, *In the American Grain* ends with the figure of Lincoln as “a woman in an old shawl—with a great bearded face” (*AG*, 234). The new world is changed in this conception. His motherland overshadows his Americanism. Elena does not give herself over to be incorporated into the United States.

Villa’s White Cool Birth

Villa’s first collection of short stories, *Footnote to Youth* (1933), includes one story entitled, “Young Writer in a New Country.” The immigrant protagonist is shown lying in bed, repeating the words, “America, America . . . wanting to know what they meant.”⁶² As the story progresses, we perceive a progression in this quest: “Do you see America getting clearer in my mind? Do you see myself getting articulate, getting voice? Little by little calm comes to my mind. Little by little comes

my white birth—a white cool birth in a new land” (*FY*, 302-3). This is a remarkable climax, with clear autobiographical resonances, showing the immigrant being reborn in the United States. Characteristically, Villa says little. Whiteness is not explicitly racialized, but with it comes clarity and calm and coolness. Is this Villa himself, freed from his cumbersome biography? Are we to read here an allegory of his self-creation as white?

Critics have broached the difficulty Villa’s work poses for the Filipino American literary canon. Nerissa Balce-Cortes and Jean Vengua Gier’s introduction to Filipino American literature points out that the history of Villa’s reception has helped “to fuel the oppositions between proletarian and formalist writing among Filipinos and Filipinos Americans.”⁶³ Indeed, Villa achieved considerable renown in an American modernist context: *Footnote to Youth* was championed by Edward O’Brien, who included pieces from it in his *Best American Short Stories* series in 1932 and 1933; Villa was nominated for the Pulitzer prize and received the Guggenheim Fellowship, the Bollingen Foundation Fellowship, and the Shelley Memorial Award. But he eschewed ethnic identification. “He would have hated the tag ‘Asian American,’” Luis Francia points out in *The Anchored Angel*, an edited volume of Villa’s work that addresses itself to his neglected literary career.⁶⁴ San Juan, Jr. clearly states the fundamental paradox of Villa’s critical reception: “How can one explain his disappearance from the Establishment consensus and his persistent invisibility as ethnic protagonist?”⁶⁵ He asks that the vagaries of Villa’s biography and critical reception be understood in terms of their “overdetermined social context”: “Villa’s personal predicament becomes an allegory of the Filipino intellectual born into a colonial world” or more broadly for “the predicament of the Third World artist who is forced to adopt the conqueror’s language for ends that he believes transcend the contingencies of birthplace, memories, concrete cultural practices, and unrepeatable experiences of specific times and places.”⁶⁶ I read the allegory of this transcendence in a comparative context. If San Juan, Jr. counters the preponderance of “formalist” readings of Villa’s work that “conspire to erase Villa’s ‘Otherness’ by assimilating it to the homogenous, totalizing space of Western modernism,” I ask how Villa himself formalizes this erasure.⁶⁷ Put differently, I seek to make Villa visible as an ethnic protagonist through the hermeneutic of brown character. I read the stories in *A Footnote to Youth* as parables of mixed identification that transcend the stigma of racialization by staging the protagonist’s rebirth in an illusive, metaphysical realm.

My readings focus on the “Wings and Blue Flame” trilogy from *Footnote to Youth*, which consists of three stories that share a common form and composition. I also consider a handful of other stories that share similar characters and motifs (“The Woman Who Looked Like Christ,” “Song I Did Not Hear,” and “Young Writer in a New Country”). These stories tell and retell, in fairly terse and sparse fashion, the protagonist’s immigration to California through Arizona to New Mexico and ultimately to New York. This is a trajectory that Villa himself took when he came to the United States in 1930 (after a break with his family and his father in particular), obtaining his Bachelor’s degree at the University of New Mexico in 1932 and then moving to New York to pursue graduate work at Columbia University. Roughly, the stories treat of the failed romance of the protagonist, thwarted by his father (at whose insistence he comes to the United States to study), a rift that is somewhat healed by the end. Villa focuses on the protagonist’s relationship with a variety of “Others,” weaving a complex web of friendship, love, and frustrated desire that Denise Cruz describes compellingly as a set of “irreconcilabilities—the uneasy, the troubling, and the disruptive within representational practices,” figured in a series of “raced, classed, gendered, and sexed differentials.”⁶⁸

The same characters recur across the stories as does a persistent symbology, involving a brown dog, white wings, and white and purple flowers. As San Juan, Jr. argues, these stories “capture the crisis of transition, the passage of the autochthonous sensibility into the increasingly commodified world.”⁶⁹ Indeed, the form of the trilogy suggests as much, offering a series of numbered prose poems that fail to meet the standards that Villa would later set for the short story: “necessity of a point,” “sense of completeness,” “dramatic-unity principle.”⁷⁰ It is not difficult to see how Villa in “crisis” failed to meet even his own stringent criteria of unity in the trilogy. Of the stories that follow, “Song I Did Not Hear” is also in this pattern, but the other two stories are not. “Young Writer in a New Country” achieves a more conventional narrative unity, exemplifying, in my view, the achievement of the protagonist’s rebirth in the crucible of this “new land.” On the one hand we are faced with what San Juan, Jr. identifies as “fragmentation, loss of depth, schizophrenic disjunction,” or the irreconcilable in Cruz’s formulation.⁷¹ But on the other hand, there is an effort to achieve a transcendental unity, to which the rebirth of the protagonist out of the throes of this crisis testifies (recalling *The Book of Khalid*’s “puerperal pains of mind” and the ensuing rise of the Superman of America).

Across these stories, the protagonist tries to locate himself within the racialized landscape of the United States. On the train from California to New Mexico, he encounters a Pullman porter: “The nigger in the Pullman hummed to himself. At night he prepared our berths and he was automatic like a machine. As I looked at him I knew I did not want to be a machine” (*FY*, 74). In this racist rendering, Villa figures the black worker as an automaton at the very horizon of humanity, a limit with which the protagonist does not identify nor want to be identified. The romance plot leads him to the other extreme, to the fetishization of white women: “Then I fell in love with Georgia. Georgia had golden hair and I became enamored of it” (*FY*, 78). It is unclear whether he is in love with Georgia or with her whiteness. A related homoerotic fascination with Jack develops as well, seemingly premised upon the latter’s Swedish ancestry. What begins with the protagonist receiving “ugly glances because I was a foreigner” ends in superlative expressions of his desire for Jack (*FY*, 99). Yet others are situated in the range between blackness and whiteness. David (“poor, who wore slovenly clothes”) occupies a class with which the protagonist does not fully identify, despite the latter’s claim to being his “first friend”: “You got no speed, David. You must be left behind,” Villa writes, as though ventriloquizing a hegemonic class consciousness (*FY*, 302). We are also introduced to Joseph Lieberman, repeatedly identified as Jewish, and Johnny, who appears to be Armenian (“with dark eyes and an olive skin”) but then claims to be Welsh (*FY*, 103).

Although Joseph and Johnny are clearly better friends to him, the protagonist confesses to liking Jack better in what develops into a masochistic fascination: “Of all the friends I had had Jack hurt me the most”; “I loved him the most too,” Villa declares in two successively numbered prose poems (*FY*, 255). Despite the fact that he is not clearly racialized, the protagonist has a growing sense of his own difference, pointed up in part by Jack. In one scene, he tries unsuccessfully to hitchhike: “Nobody had cared to pick me up. Walking home I felt humiliated” (*FY*, 98). It is this drama of ambiguous and ambivalent racialization that builds up to his “cool white birth” in the “new land.”

This concrete exposition of social relations is overlaid by a complex and recurrent symbolism tied to Villa’s rendering of the protagonist as a lover. “As for myself I had always been a lover,” he confesses, harking back to the thwarted romance that instigates his immigration and the rift with his father (*FY*, 104). Villa describes this originary scene of trauma in terms of a symbolic exchange: “I

was very angry I became a poet. In fancy my anger became a gorgeous purple flower. I made love to it with my long fingers. Then when I had won it and it shone like a resplendent gem in my hands I offered it to my father"; his father is "not a lover," however, and refuses this offering, sowing the seeds of this enduring conceit (*FY*, 80-1). The last story of the trilogy delivers a resolution in snippets, across a series of different prose poems. Hungry and lonely in New York, the protagonist finds himself living in "a little dark room and it was dark and ugly" and "cold in the room" (*FY*, 83, 85). A "strong wind" blows into this scene of deprivation, bringing with it "a white flower trembling with love . . . God's white flower" (*FY*, 83). At the end, he has undergone a transformation and is in the throes of a new romance: "My god was in her hair. My god was there with my purple flower pressed gently to his breast. I opened his hands and he yielded to me my flower. I pinned it to Aurora's hair. And as the purple petals kissed the soft dark of her hair, my flower turned silver, then white—became God's white flower. Then I was no longer angry with my father" (*FY*, 89).

With Aurora dawns an absolution that paves the way for another climactic conclusion, this time pertaining to his conflict with Jack. "Walk at Midnight" finds the protagonist on a starlit mesa, in a field of flowers, "flowing into flowers" under the spread of "God's white wings," until he confesses to "taking Jack out of me and giving him to the earth and to the sky, and the white flowers in my hands were my gifts of forgiveness" (*FY*, 129, 130). San Juan, Jr. reads this scene as part of a "process of canceling the possessive and privatizing libidinal investment" of the protagonist and substituting, in the end, the "I" of Villa for Jack such that these stories effect "the transfer of libidinal cathexis to a new or remade self now assured of its capacity to give, and receive, pleasure."⁷² But I propose we read these scenes as part of a manic identification: the protagonist takes Jack out and makes a gift of him to the landscape. Desire is broadened, generalized. The protagonist is euphoric. "I am hungry for You, O God!" Villa writes in the passage immediately preceding, expressing a transcendent desire, an overbroad cathexis, that does not seem to be fulfilled (*FY*, 130).

For the desire for whiteness is literally dogged by the stigma of racialization throughout these stories. The protagonist describes being followed by a "brown dog" on his way to university. "One morning when I was going to school a brown dog followed me. I became afraid of him because he had panther eyes. I wanted to run but I did not want to show I was afraid. I would not be afraid of a dog" (*FY*, 106). This incident prompts an extended recollection about a puppy given to him by a friend which was not allowed inside the house by his father and died outside in the cold after a few days. He is fixated on his father's lack of regret: "At night I said, 'Father is not sorry . . . he is not sorry'" (*FY*, 107). The brown dog returns again, a few stanzas later, and once again recalls the protagonist's old memory: "The brown dog followed me in silence and when I reached the university I tried to put him out of my mind but I could not stop thinking of my dog and my father" (*FY*, 108). The second appearance prompts a vision of reconciliation, in which he sees his father as "a tree with fullgrown branches that gave a cool shade," its "leaves . . . trembling with contrition," and then finds himself in the arms of his father, acknowledging him as "God," and subsequently loses his fear of the brown dog (*FY*, 108, 109). The creature is then adopted into his makeshift family: him, Johnny, and the dog. It is noteworthy that the protagonist names the dog "Wicki" after Jack's surname. The dog is the surrogate for Jack ("when I play with Wicki I shall think of you"), and he only neglects the dog in order to go watch a movie with Jack (*FY*, 110). When Wicki does not find his way home, the protagonist's loss is interwoven with a larger, looming loss: "Wicki was lost to me. Everything I loved I lost. When my father separated me and Vi I lost my girl. I lost David because he

had no money for school. I lost Wicki. In the summer when school was over I would lose Jack and Johnny” (*FY*, 112-3).

This overlay of correspondences invites us to read in the story of the brown dog a complex racial allegory that sets the scene for the protagonist’s rebirth. The dog seems to signify the overdetermined minoritization of the Filipino immigrant, suffused with fear, trauma, and constraint. The fact that the protagonist names the dog for Jack, who represents the allure of withheld whiteness, seems to be his way of owning these privileges. This attempt obviously fails, for the “brown dog” nonetheless gets left behind. This is a “White Interlude,” as the title attests, a story of thwarted desire and failed attachment in which whiteness is only available to the protagonist as temporary respite.

I want to return now to the scene of “cool white birth” I described briefly at the start of this section. The story that reaches this climax, “Young Writer in a New Country,” looks back over the events of the trilogy from the vantage of a certain distance, inscribed within the structure of the collection itself. Unlike the trilogy, the details are woven into a more unified narrative form, as though the earlier fragmented treatment is insufficient. Villa deals with the story of his immigration once more, from beginning to end. He recapitulates the cast of characters to which we have already been introduced: “Here Aurora and Georgia. Here Joe and Wiley—Jack, Rey and Louise. And all the time the sands of New Mexico windscattered, windloved” (*FY*, 300). He is “in the white land” the protagonist claims, as the scene of nativity is set:

Do you see America getting clearer in my mind? Do you see myself getting articulate, getting voice? Little by little calm comes to my mind. Little by little comes my white birth—a white cool birth in a new land.

It was then that my stories were born—of the homeland and the new land. Some of you may have read them—they were cool, afire with coolth.

I, father of tales. Fathering tales I became rooted to the new land. I became lover to the desert. Three tales had healed me. (*FY*, 302-3)

The protagonist finds his roots in the new world as a writer, “father of tales.” We get a clear sense of Villa’s view upon this collection of stories and upon the trilogy more specifically (to which I assume the “three tales” refers). This whiteness is no doubt racialized, as the complex allegorical meanings of these stories suggests. But it is also tied to a metaphysical clarity and calm—a “peace” to which the protagonist alludes at the end of the story. He looks back upon his journey from the vantage of New York, and his longing at this moment surprises even him:

What I am trying to say is that I left the desert, the desert of my white birth—and now I want to return to it. I want it to enfold me completely, I will surrender, I will never leave it.

But in the homeland, *there* I was young

Do you get what I am driving you to see? I am crying for the desert, for the peace of the *desert*.

Will the native land forgive? Between your peace and the peace of a strange faraway desert—Between your two peaces—

O tell softly, softly. Forgive softly. (*FY*, 303-4)

This is an enigmatic closing, in which the protagonist tries to make sense of the vagaries of his desire. He longs for the setting of his white birth, for the New Mexico desert more so than for his homeland. Perhaps this longing occasions his contrition. The penultimate sentiment is equivocal: he finds himself somewhere between these “two peaces,” the Philippines and New Mexico. It is as though the scene of new world nativity redirects the immigrant desire for return. His “white birth” takes on paramount importance for the protagonist. He is a brown character, who seeks to be reborn as white, to be peaceably erased. Villa’s stories (“afire with coolth”) represent the paradox of this impossible desire.

It is not difficult to relate Villa’s production of brown character back to his own life. Even though he was ostensibly part of the same modernist milieu as Williams, Villa was well aware of his marginalization. Asked if he was considered an American poet by critics in a 1982 interview, Villa answered in the negative, citing the fact that he was denied the Bollingen Prize in 1949 (which went to Wallace Stevens instead) because he was not an American citizen.⁷³ Although he lived primarily in New York from 1930 onwards, he was actively engaged in defining English-language literature in the Philippines, appointed as Presidential Adviser on Cultural Affairs in 1968 and elected Philippines National Artist in 1973; he became a permanent resident but not a citizen of the United States. In the 1982 interview, he voices his strange proximity to and distance from the privileges of citizenship: “Yes, I am a Filipino, but an American resident.”⁷⁴ The attenuated, yet tangible, strain of mixed identification in his work emerges out of his situation as a noncitizen nonalien subject of the United States.

His later works would continue to express this mixed identification, in excess of the strictures of biography. Two poems in particular are exemplary of this desire. The first is a lyric from *Volume Two* (1949):

What , is , equal , to ,
Is , equal , to ,

But , not , it.
Equality , is ,

Achieved , relation,
But , the , equation ,

Is , not , Identity ,
Identity , is ,

Solitary , Unit.⁷⁵

The form of the “comma poems,” as Villa describes them in the introduction to this volume, is apt here. “Equality” is “Achieved , relation” the poet writes, the relation between those two words itself disrupted by the pause the comma stipulates. “Identity” is not “Equality” but, as the last, lonely line testifies, a “Solitary , Unit.” This singular prospect is heightened by the demand of punctuation in the poem, which goes so far as to refuse the achievement of relation even within a given line. This would seem to be far from the broad cathexes of brown character. And yet relation is not entirely

precluded, as would be the case with a more definitive break (such as a period). For the final word bespeaks relationality: the “unit” is in one sense a standard measure for other quantities and, in another sense, an individual regarded as part of a group (or unity). To my mind, this poem expresses the vexed desire of the majority-identified minority subject who seeks a representative identity.

Among Villa’s “Early Poems,” included in *Selected Poems and New* (1958), is another suggestive lyric:

My portrait is my not-face
My portrait has this grace:
Where is your portrait
That has no face?

Your faces have no portraits
My portrait has no face:
Between your face and my face
God’s portrait graciously waits.

Where are your beautiful portraits?
Your portraits without faces?
What is a portrait
If it is only a face.⁷⁶

Villa develops a distinction between his appearance and his portraiture, signifying the estrangement between autobiography and art that more broadly characterizes his oeuvre. The “grace” of his portrait is precisely that it is “not-face,” the absence of biography. “God’s portrait” is inseparable from this portraiture, as we see even in *A Footnote to Youth*, where self-realization arrives in the terms of religious epiphany as the protagonist wanders across the New Mexico desert. There are other resonances between Villa’s stories and his poems: “the strangest country” into which the poet’s “heart was made” in the course of a beatific vision in *Have Come, Am Here* (1942), or the “The Greatest Nativity” being that of “Everness” exalted in another poem in that collection, or in “The Anchored Angel” of *Selected Poems and New*, finding a “homecoming” in a rebirth of Biblical proportions.⁷⁷

In a “Plan for Work” submitted as part of his application for the Guggenheim Fellowship (which he received in 1942), Villa describes his single motive as “the search for the metaphysical meaning of man’s life in the universe,” finding in poetry “the advantage over prose . . . in being able to deal directly with essences.”⁷⁸ In a sense, mixed identification takes metaphysical form in his work: a religious nativity is entailed in the protagonist’s white birth (recalling the transcendentalism of the Indian and Syrian writers).

Reading Villa’s work through the lens of brown character allows us to understand a strain of mixed identification in the work of other Filipino immigrant writers as well. I am thinking of Carlos Bulosan’s work in particular, which repeatedly cathects around the idea of America. In a collected edition of poems Bulosan published a few years earlier, *Chorus for America* (1942), he includes a poem of his own, “History of the Heart,” which has some of the visionary quality of Villa’s poetry as the speaker walks “through bourgeois homes,” as though “homeward to America, across the snow”; in “Multitude and the Dance of Multitude,” the speaker, terrified by the specter of war about him,

turns in another direction, “to face / The sunlight showering the heart of America,” seeing in another face his own “vision”: “Where the American dream might have crossed a thousand / Times to touch the mainspring of the awakened heart.”⁷⁹

This “heart of America” finds expression in Bulosan’s semi-autobiographical novel, itself titled *America is in the Heart* (1946). A well-known passage from the text (a soliloquy by the narrator’s brother Macario) exemplifies this cathexis around the idea of America:

“It is but fair to say that America is not a land of one race or one class of men. We are all Americans that have toiled and suffered and known oppression and defeat, from the first Indian that offered peace in Manhattan to the last Filipino pea pickers. America is not bound by geographical latitudes. America is not merely a land or an institution. America is in the hearts of men that died for freedom; it is also in the eyes of men that are building a new world. America is a prophecy of a new society of men: of a system that knows no sorrow or strife or suffering. America is a warning to those who would try to falsify the ideas of freemen.

“America is also the nameless foreigner, the homeless refugee, the hungry boy begging for a job and the black body dangling on a tree. America is the illiterate immigrant who is ashamed that the world of books and intellectual opportunities is closed to him. We are all that nameless foreigner, that homeless refugee, that hungry boy, that illiterate immigrant and that lynched black body. All of us, from the first Adams to the last Filipino, native born or alien, educated or illiterate—*We are America!*

“The old world is dying, but a new world is being born. . . . with less sacrifice and agony on the living. . . .”⁸⁰

Critics have found this passage troubling because of its overt Americanism.⁸¹ There is a strain of mixed identification that runs throughout the text. The narrator’s arrival in the United States is staged in terms of the familiar scenario of colonial recognition. Everything seems “native and promising”: “It was like coming home after a long voyage, although as yet I had no home in this city. Everything seemed familiar and kind. . . . I knew that I must find a home in this new land.”⁸² He feels an attachment to land that develops over the course of the narrative: “it was merely a desire to possess a plot of earth and to draw nourishment from it. But now this desire to possess, after long years of flight and disease and want, had become an encompassing desire to *belong* to the land—perhaps to the whole world.”⁸³ One might say that Bulosan is interested in the production of an American nativity that opens on to the “whole world”—a *new* world, in which the “All” of America find equality and justice. By his admission, he finds his “own role in the turbulent drama of history” towards the end of the book, organizing workers in California; the prospect of revolution is, he realizes, “the one and only common thread that bound us together, white and black and brown, in America.”⁸⁴ Even as he embarks upon this work, he looks back across the full sweep of his journey, closing with a vision of “the American earth . . . like a huge heart unfolding warmly to receive me”: “It came to me that no man—no one at all—could destroy my faith in America again.”⁸⁵

Villa and Bulosan both share this expression of majoritarian identification, if in radically different form. It is precisely the “Achieved , relation” that Villa describes that is the basis of the narrator’s identity in *America is in the Heart*. But America is the source of visionary “faith” in both accounts. As Augusto Fauni Espiritu points out, Bulosan’s writings are shaped by a folk Christianity

that “found expression in the payson, a native adaptation of the New Testament, which became an integral part of popular culture”; he reads *America is in the Heart* within this tradition, unearthing “the imagery of *liwanag*,” or redemptive illumination (also an important feature of the payson), in Bulosan’s writings.⁸⁶ It is possible to see how Villa and Bulosan come out of this shared history, the outgrowth of Spanish colonialism into a broader spiritual discourse of new world nativity that allows us to consider two writers who are generally read apart from one another.

The production of nativity in Villa and Bulosan’s work is inseparable from the genealogy of colonial subjection of the Philippines. World War II in particular reshaped the public view of Filipino immigrants, who found “newfound respect as the ‘different’ Asians, the ones who were clearly pro-American, even at the cost of the freedom of their homeland.”⁸⁷ Buaken’s *I Have Lived with the American People* registers the imbrication of the Philippines and the United States during this period, which informs the mixed identifications that I consider here. “Filipinos are one with America,” he claims towards the end of the book, which devotes itself in a closing section (itself titled “One with America”) to explaining the propinquity of the Philippines and the United States while at the same time defending Filipino nationalism.⁸⁸ This paradoxical defense of Americanism and foreign nationalism is reminiscent of the writings I consider in Chapters 1 and 2. Like the Syrian and Indian writers, Buaken also constructs a complex genealogy of Filipino racialization, describing Filipinos in a language of cultural pluralism that was quite possibly familiar to his audience. The Filipino is the product of “a melting pot of racial strains” that he is nonetheless quite careful to distinguish: “Hindu, Persian, Arab, and Aryan blood inheritance—no Mongolian or Negroid,” if “Chinese” then not “until very late in Philippine history,” with no question of “any Japanese blood which was acceptable to the Philippine people.”⁸⁹ His association of Filipinos with groups generally deemed to be Caucasian in this period is fascinating, as is his interest in distinguishing “Mongolian” bloodlines, which would not only have been associated with the genealogy of “yellow peril” but would also allow for the distinction of Filipinos as “Malay” in terms of racial classifications prevalent at the turn of the twentieth century.⁹⁰ He then goes on to trace a series of correspondences between Americans and Filipinos: feeling for the land, local loyalty, feminism, gregariousness, neighborliness, and so on. “None of the passivity of the Orient in him,” Buaken writes of José Rizal, wanting to distinguish the Filipino from the “Oriental” while at the same time to trumpet the ideal of an independent Philippines.⁹¹ At one point, he claims that “the lure of America got into . . . my heart!”⁹² This is a much less revolutionary conception of “America” than what Bulosan offers in *America is in the Heart*, but it nonetheless creates a vexed entente between the United States and the Philippines.

The specter of Filipino-white miscegenation represented the overdetermined prospect of this union. Bienvenido Santos offers a particular snapshot of this scene in *You Lovely People* (1955), a collection of stories initially published in the Philippines, treating of his sojourn in the United States during World War II. The narrator of “A Peculiar Rustling” evokes a compelling image upon his first visit to the Capitol: “In spring and summertime, they have walked in the parks, and have posed for pictures, little brown man in an expensive suit, arm around the waist of a smiling—often a little taller—American girl . . . the important thing through the ages being the brown man’s arm around the white girl’s waist.”⁹³ Here is the embodiment of the strange proximity of the “brown man” and the “white girl.” Santos treats of this relationship in stories like “Woman Afraid” and “Ash Wednesday,” which focus on the decline of the white woman, ostracized from family and friends,

into depression and madness, and “Brown Coterie,” which explores the intrusion of a white woman into a space of Filipino camaraderie.

Susan Koshy has already demonstrated the very different cultural valences of the “white man-Asian woman dyad” versus the “Asian man-white woman dyad”; her reading of *America is in the Heart* shows how Bulosan contends with “the *hypercorporeality* of the native/migrant subject, or the reduction of Filipino subjectivity to primordial sensations, appetites, and propensities and the corresponding equation of Filipino culture with a primitive level of social and cultural development.”⁹⁴ Buaken’s extensive treatment of miscegenation reads as an attempt to diffuse this primitivist overdetermination of the Filipino male, positioning the latter as the target of “vicious men who have, and are, capitalizing on the sexual wants of the Filipinos.”⁹⁵ In a sense, the metaphysical relationships of Villa’s *Footnote to Youth*, particularly his choice of a rich symbolism over a realist corporeality, might be understood as an attempt to diffuse the stereotype of the over-sexed Filipino. Sexual naturalization (and its literary treatments) seems to be inseparable from the production of brown character both here and in the Syrian and Indian examples.

Although Buaken cheerfully offers “dual citizenship” to Americans (“you retain your citizenship in the United States and obtain Filipino citizenship at the same time”), both Bulosan and Villa are less sanguine about this possibility.⁹⁶ Indeed, the Filipino campaign for citizenship is an important thematic of *America is in the Heart*. “I was discovering things,” the narrator says, upon finding out that Macario is not eligible for employment in the civil service.⁹⁷ Given the tenuous hold of Filipinos upon the privileges of American citizenship, given their status as noncitizen nonaliens, it is no surprise that Villa desires self-erasure. Whereas Bulosan is able to find in metonymic representations of “America” the prospect of a “new” world and Buaken the promise of Philippine nationalism, Villa finds neither in the landscape of the real. His majoritarian identification is of a more abstract order.

Villa’s metaphysical poetics ultimately bring him to “a strange country,” the “Country of Doveglion,” in an odd personal statement entitled “A Composition” (1953).⁹⁸ Villa claims the name of this country as his own: “My true name is Doveglion. / My business is ascension.”⁹⁹ Although he distinguishes his ascension from Biblical ascension, it is nonetheless spiritual. For this country is inhabited by the angels of earth and heaven. The “soul” is Villa’s “grand dominion,” his “grand possession,” in a climax that recalls the range of the Superman of America: “The I of Identity, the eye of Eternity, is the *ore-I*, the fundamentalizer I. The I that cannot discontinue itself: the truefarer amazer I. The voyager, ransomer and parablister I: the I that accosts and marauds eternity—the covenantal I. This is the „I,, I write about, the true and classic I, the I of the Upward Gravity.”¹⁰⁰ San Juan, Jr. argues that Villa writes from the position of a “colonized subaltern . . . in a limbo of indeterminacy, neither citizen nor alien.”¹⁰¹ I would add that Villa transcends this indeterminacy, eschewing “limbo” for the fictive principality of brown character, where his manic identifications can find a home. “Biography I have none and shall have none. All my Pure shall beggar and defy biography,” Villa claims toward the end of the piece.¹⁰² The ambition of *A Footnote to Youth*’s “white cool birth” is realized here. For in the course of “ascension,” Villa gives up the ghost of his biography.

Part of Everything

The figure of the *pocho* has been said to represent the Americanized Mexican. Julio A. Martínez and Francisco A. Lomelí capture the range of signification of the term: including its

dictionary meaning as “colorless” or “faded,” broader figurative sense as “sad, disillusioned,” and its cultural connotations “associated with historical or cultural treachery . . . by Mexicans in reference to other Mexicans—native or U.S. born—who feign being other than what they are.”¹⁰³ This is a pejorative term, as Arturo Madrid-Barela points out in a piece entitled, “The Different Mexicans,” which resonates with the “‘different’ Asians” I describe above: “It was not an affectionate apodo. To be a pocho was only slightly less worse than being a pinche gringo.”¹⁰⁴

It makes sense then that the term first arises in Villarreal’s *Pocho* when the protagonist, Richard Rubio, is confronted with a representation of Mexico in the figure of Pilar Ramírez, the daughter of a family friend who has just arrived in the United States. She laughs at his Spanish, “which was a California-MexicanAmerican Castilian. ‘I am a Pocho,’ he said, ‘and we speak like this because here in California we make Castilian words out of English words.’”¹⁰⁵ It is a tender moment rather than a divisive one. Villarreal’s use of the term is doubtless tied up with his own experience with it: “For my generation in the Santa Clara Valley, pocho was really a term of endearment. Our parents called us ‘pocho.’ Or even ‘pochita.’ It was a love title,” he says in a 2001 interview.¹⁰⁶ This sense of endearment is conveyed in the exchange between Richard and Pilar. Although the latter’s amusement transforms Richard into a self-declared “pocho,” a strange “MexicanAmerican” hybrid of English and Spanish, he is nonetheless perfectly comprehensible to her: “It matters not,” she says in response to his explanation, “I understand you perfectly well (*PO*, 165).

Under the weight of its title, however, the text elaborates various scenes of mixed identification. This foundational Chicano novel retells the coming of age of Richard in depression-era California between the Mexican Revolution and World War II. It has a vexed status within the field of Chicano studies, particularly insofar as this field has emerged out of the Chicano movement. “Nobody ever rallied to the cry of Pocho Power,” Madrid-Barela wryly notes.¹⁰⁷ Critics have variously described the novel as “somewhat of an embarrassment to Chicanos” and referred to Villarreal’s “most precarious status as a Chicano writer” whose “treatment is flawed by a habit of oversimplification.”¹⁰⁸ While responsible for renewing interest in *Pocho*, the 1970 edition popularized an assimilationist reading of the text. “No longer are Chicanos ‘lost’ Richards,” the introduction by Ramón Eduardo Ruiz declared, citing the “gulf” that has developed between Villarreal’s “generation of Mexican-Americans and chicanos.”¹⁰⁹ José Saldívar attributes the fact of *Pocho*’s publication, as the first known Chicano novel to be taken up by a major New York publishing house to its portrayal of a stereotypical Mexican immigrant experience: “social maladjustment, the individual and his environment, the pathological character of the Chicano family, illegals, violence, and criminal behavior.”¹¹⁰ Saldívar’s brief reading of the text suggests that the figure of the *pocho* poses a particular problem for Chicano literary history. He describes the book as “Villarreal’s attempt to write about the ‘pocho’ (an Americanized Mexican) experience in California. In so doing, the author (unwittingly) projects a stereotypical view.”¹¹¹ The bracketed terms disclose the problem at hand. What should we do with the figure of the Americanized Mexican and with the intentionality of the author in this respect, particularly given that this is a semi-autobiographical novel? Villa’s own parents were born and raised in peonage in Zacatecas, and his father fought for seven years in Pancho Villa’s army; himself born in Los Angeles in 1924, Villa moved throughout California with his family as they worked as seasonal farm workers, living primarily in Mexican encampments until they settled in Santa Clara in 1930. As he claims in the 2001 interview, “everything I wrote was truth: it was fiction, but it was truth.”¹¹²

Another strain of criticism insists on reading *Pocho* as a narrative of decolonization insofar as Villarreal, “knowingly or not,” in A. Robert Lee’s words, produces the “consciousness of his race’ who will translate *la raza*, the people, into the permanence of the written word.”¹¹³ Timothy Sedore takes a different approach, arguing that “Villarreal’s protagonists find solace in the American Adamic destiny of a place apart”; in this sense, “Villarreal has been shamelessly conforming to non-conformity all along. He belongs with Chicanos. He is one of them.”¹¹⁴ This line of argumentation erases precisely the difference that other critics wish to underscore: that, contrary to Sedore’s conclusion, which equates Richard’s “place apart” with Gloria Anzaldúa’s “claim to sites of resistance,” there are in fact varieties of non-conformity that have very different political implications, that set apart revolutionary Chicanismo from Adamic individualism.¹¹⁵ We need a way of situating Villarreal that does not involve bracketing him on the one hand or equating him with a writer like Anzaldúa.

I propose we situate *Pocho* in the context of a comparative genealogy of mixed identification. In what follows, I read Richard as a paradigmatic figuration of brown character. He does not occupy a “place apart,” in my view. Rather than understanding him in terms of a separatist individualism, what might it mean to read him in terms of manic universalism? “I can be a part of everything,” Richard claims (*PO*, 152). His overbroad identifications (Mexican and American, indigenous and Castilian, American and foreign, black and white, heteronormative and queer) are exemplified by the queering of desire within the text. “Richard will consistently choose *not* to choose. Herein lies Richard’s generic difference,” as Ramon Saldívar points out.¹¹⁶ Put differently, Richard faces the impossible choice of the majority-identified minority subject.

The first section of this eleven-part narrative finds Richard’s father on the train from Mexico City to Juárez. The young and intemperate Colonel Rubio (“paradigmatic hero, patriarch, and warrior, a virtual model of the stereotyped, sentimental, and reified hero of the very different Greater Mexican corrido tradition,” in Saldívar’s words) is nonetheless a relic of the Mexican Revolution, part of a bygone era that is brought to a swift end when Rubio gets news of Pancho Villa’s assassination and resolutely turns his back on his old life.¹¹⁷ He is figured as one among “the great exodus that came of the Mexican Revolution,” a “bewildered people” in “the ancient quest for El Dorado” who “moved onward, west to New Mexico and Arizona and California, and as they moved, they planted their new seed” (*PO*, 15, 16). The characteristic third-person narration of the first part of the text shifts abruptly toward the end of this section, which literally plants this “new seed.”

Richard’s mother, Consuelo, gives birth to him in the mode of free indirect discourse, which reads at first as an exception but then goes on to serve as the characteristic form of the text. The predominating dialogue, with meager glimpses into the characters’ inner life, gives way to a narrative effusion, following a distracted Consuelo out of the house:

She took a few steps, and suddenly she did not know where she was going, or for what reason she was outside the house. She looked at the lamp in her hand for a long moment, then set it on the ground and wandered aimlessly. Now she walked on the creekbed, first on gravel, and the sound her shoes made on the pebbles penetrated her senses, and in her mind she was back on the hacienda in Zacatecas, walking on a dry creekbed such as this, although she did not know she was on a creekbed, on her way to a manantial for water. She reached a sandy stretch and walked on, and she was dangerously near the bank of the canal. The urge to urinate, which had left her, returned with an intensity she could not resist, and she undid her

cotton drawers and squatted, holding the folds of her dress under her armpits. And there on the soft sand she dropped her child. (*PO*, 30)

The narration moves with Consuelo, as though in a trance. We are transported from California to Zacatecas with the movement of her thoughts. The birth is rendered with little sentimentality, that is until Juan finds mother and child and carries them back home, suffused with emotion. And we are given an extended glimpse into his inner life: “he cried. . . because he was relaxed and because for a moment he had caught a glimpse of the cycle of life, lucidly not penumbrally, and he knew love and he knew also that all this was good” (*PO*, 31).

This heightening of free indirect discourse represents, in my view, the difficulty of situating Richard squarely in one lineage or another. A structure of paradox is built into the very form of the narrative. Richard is clearly the “new seed” of the northward immigration. But the scene of his nativity is at once profound and superficial. For even as the “new seed” is planted, the narrative looses its traditional moorings, freely moving in and out of the characters minds and in between Mexico and the United States. Juan shows a concern for this freedom. Having told his daughter to “cover up the mess with sand,” he returns to the dry creek “to deeper bury the afterbirth, for he had a dread that a stray dog would be attracted and eat his blood”; immediately afterward, Villarreal writes that their “nomadic pace increased,” bringing them to Santa Clara where they would finally settle, Juan’s “chains” grow “incrementally heavier on his heart” despite his desire to return to Mexico (*PO*, 30, 31). Richard’s birth represents this attenuated nativity, a claim upon the land that is nonetheless destabilized by a broader aspiration built into the very form of the narrative, grounded in the (soft) soil of the text.

Throughout *Pocho*, Richard is stigmatized as a racialized figure. His classmates denounce him as “blackie” on different occasions (*PO*, 68, 118). They also target the perceived cultural markers of his Mexicanness: they call him “cholo, because they did not want any chilebeans hanging around,” as well as “Frijoley bomber” and “Tortilla strangler” (*PO*, 41, 47). His friendship with Mary, the daughter of a snobbish Protestant family, makes of him a creature of the earth, true to the scene of his birth. The book he loans Mary disgusts the latter’s mother: “Where did you pick up that dirty thing? . . . It’s filthy. . . . Take it out to the porch, and tomorrow you return it to him. The idea, handling a dirty thing like that! You might catch something from it!” (*PO*, 77). Her concern is broader than the book, of course, and shapes Richard into a figure for contagion, associated with dirt and disease.

To a certain extent, Richard identifies with this abjection, which shores up his epistemological rebellion, bordering on a kind of *pocho* power. “I like the smell of horseshit,” he tells Mary on one occasion, provoking her pious sensibility on the one hand but also claiming his lineage as the son of a *peón* and *jinete*; he cannot use the term “manure,” he explains, because this is “something you use to make things grow. I ought to know, because my father works on ranches” (*PO*, 75). His closest attachments are to figures who are themselves marginal: João Pedro Manôel Alves, “Joe Pete,” who comes from the Azores looking for the Portuguese settlement in Santa Clara; the Italian Ricky Malatesta who hopes to change his name because it is “too Dago-sounding”; and Thomas Nakano with “crooked little legs that were browner than his” (*PO*, 80, 111, 105).

Cruz’s insight about Villa’s work is applicable here insofar as Villarreal can be said to produce a “collection of ‘others’” (“the uneasy, the troubling, and the disruptive within representational practices”) refracted through the story of Richard’s sexual coming of age. From early on in the novel,

Villarreal shows Richard to be contending with the various prohibitive and mysterious injunctions of the Catholic church. After a conversation with his mother about his sexual urges and experiences results in the young Richard being denounced as “bad” and “filthy,” he wonders about this “mystery so great that it could not be spoken about”: “To do ‘bad’ things had something to do with being alive, but really what were ‘bad’ things?” (*PO*, 37). When his mother goes into labor Richard is thrown into paroxysms of guilt and fear, knowing that childbirth is part of the inaccessible and terrifying “mystery.” Yet years later, we encounter a very different adolescent, forthrightly confessing his sexual fantasies with the awareness that “the good Padre was somehow enjoying these weekly conversations” (*PO*, 114). When the priest denounces Richard as “thoroughly evil,” the reader learns that his fear of God has ceased, that he now has an ironical distance from the goodness of the Padre and the Church (*PO*, 116).

It is instructive that Richard refuses to join in the general condemnation of Joe Pete once it is discovered that he has molested another child while at the same time being careful to detach himself from the stigma of his association. Richard perceives the underlying concern with his friendship with Joe Pete: “You mean was he a homosexual? No, he wasn’t,” Richard tells the police, despite Joe Pete’s confessions to distinctly “*queer*” desire, a term that Richard himself employs in this context (*PO*, 89). He is careful to assuage the fear and anger of his homophobic father without a direct condemnation of Joe Pete, a liminal stance that he takes elsewhere in the text, defending his associations with “a couple of guys that looked queer as hell” (according to Ricky) while at the same time acquitting himself as “straight” (*PO*, 177). In fact, the turning point in Richard’s friendship with Ricky takes place when the latter is unable to accept Richard’s confession of love without accusing him of “going queer”: “Everything was spoiled now. They could be friendly, perhaps, but they could never be friends again” (*PO*, 112). Ricky will not support the homoerotics of their friendship, a fact that Richard finds insupportable. In effect, Ricky shows himself incapable of thinking about their relationship in anything but binary terms, the terms of good and evil into which Richard has been inculcated by the church.

Queerness, in my view, operates as a mode of majoritarian desire within the text, insofar as it exceeds the dichotomous strictures of Richard’s largely Catholic upbringing and society while nonetheless allowing him to profess clarity on the essentials—that he has “the feeling for girls already,” as he puts it (*PO*, 90). In other words, Richard cultivates a wide array of cathexes that are not mutually exclusive of one another.

His desire for whiteness operates in a similarly broad register, as the following exchange between Richard and his father reveals:

“I am Buck Jones and Ken Maynard and Fred Thompson, all rolled into one—I’m not Tom Mix, too, because I don’t like brown horses.” And he settled down to think some more. . . .

Richard was still thinking of Silver King. “Do you think, Papá,” he said, “that when we go to México I could have a horse?”

“That is understood.”

“A white one, and very big?”

“If you want,” said Juan Rubio. “But why do you want a white one?”

“Because I want the best.”

“Who told you that? White horses are usually little more than useless.”

“You are playing with me,” said Richard. “Everybody knows that a white horse is the best horse there is.”

Juan Rubio laughed. “Hoo, that shows how much you know. That is only in the moving pictures, but if you knew anything about horses, you would know that a good horse is not chosen for his color.” (*PO*, 96-7)

This fascinating conversation takes place on the event of Richard’s twelfth birthday. He wakes up that morning with an apprehension of the momentousness of the day, with a bold, yet precarious, sense of his newfound masculinity: he feels “a new strength surge through his sinews and loins” while at the same time finding his childhood fears renewed, sensing that “he was a sissy, really”; he has a “hardon, and it was a real good one,” but at the same time he watches for signs that he might be a hermaphrodite (*PO*, 95, 96). It makes sense that he discusses horses with his father, given that horsemanship is tied to Juan’s sense of his own masculinity. Consuelo mediates this conversation, praising her husband’s achievements in what develops into a rare moment of intimacy between them. Richard’s movie knowledge is pitted against his father’s experience in a discussion that is clearly racialized. Raised on a steady diet of Hollywood cowboys, Richard sees “white” horses as the best, clearly preferring Fred Thompson’s Silver King to Tom Mix’s Tony. “They were very pretty horses, but they were all brown,” Richard goes on to say, clarifying the difference between two breeds of horse for his mother; but this distinction based on color is incomprehensible to his father. “A horse is a horse!” Juan affirms (*PO*, 97).

It becomes clear that the family is not just talking about horses when they turn to the issue of race immediately following, explaining to Richard his own pedigree: “you are Indian, too, as well as Spanish and probably even French,” Consuelo says (*PO*, 99). Juan demurs: “We are Mexicans, Richard, that is all. Your mother has the funny idea that we carry the blood of every cuckold who has ever exploited our country, and that would include the whole world—even the gringos. She has a love for Spaniards I could never have” (*PO*, 99). Something in Richard’s desire for a “white” horse prompts this inventory of their blood lines. Consuelo’s *mestizaje* is revealed to be very different from Juan’s nationalism. He identifies as Mexican, but on the side of the oppressed. Consuelo clarifies Juan’s antipathy toward the Spaniard thus: “Your father is a kind man, my son, and when he says the Spaniard, it does not mean that he is against the race, only that it fell upon the lot of the landowners to be Spanish!”—only to engender “a new respect” in Richard (*PO*, 101). Juan has his own reading of the way racialization works in the United States: “All the people who are pushed around in the rest of the world come here, because here they can maybe push someone else around. . . . That is why they teach their children to call you a cholo and a dirty Mexican” (*PO*, 100).

In a sense, Juan understands race in class terms. Racial difference is not essential: the oppressed of the world come to redefine the terms of oppression as soon as they have the opportunity to do so. In contrast to the profusion of patrimonies that Consuelo offers Richard, for Juan it is the black and white facts of oppression that ultimately come to define identity. He suggests to Richard that his valuation of “white” over “brown” is determined by this class-based oppression. Juan seeks to arrest Richard’s asymptotic approach to whiteness, symbolized by the expression of the latter’s desire for a white horse. Richard’s newfound respect registers Juan’s claim: “Full of reverence, he looked down at the table, and the blood rose to his chest enough to stifle him, his emotion was so strong” (*PO*, 101). This suffusion of “blood” and “emotion” (heightened by his parents’ sexual attraction to one another) is momentarily strong enough to diminish the appeal of the Western

cowboy: "Richard was speechless with happiness. He forgot about the movies and went outside" (*PO*, 102).

Richard and his father are both ostensibly of the same lineage, but they cannot see their way to the same horse. The contrast between these two figures in this moment helps me to elucidate the genealogy of mixed identification that I am interested in here. Richard represents a brown character insofar as he desires a "white horse." Juan, on the other hand, represents the masculinist figure of the Mexican revolutionary hero whose entry into *Pocho* is accompanied by an act of violence against the Spaniard. Quibbling over possession of "the india," "still the most beautiful woman in the world," Juan kills a "city-bred gachupín," a Spaniard with connections to the border's "other side" (*PO*, 8, 3, 7). Driven northward, he goes against his will, manacled in "chains," looking forward to his return to Mexico. But this is a possibility that diminishes over time. When his friend Cirilo buys land, Juan refuses, not wanting this clear "admission that he would never return to México" (*PO*, 121). Paradoxically, this is when he confesses his plans to buy a house in Santa Clara, a move that represents the family's ascension into the middle class and initiates the family's breakdown. "The heretofore gradual assimilation of this new culture was becoming more pronounced," Villarreal writes, going on to draw a fairly stereotypical portrait of the ravages of assimilation upon the Rubios (*PO*, 132). Even as his mother begins to reject the role of housekeeper and assenting wife, Richard begins to speak English at the dinner table, claiming "we must live like Americans," with his sister following suit: "My teacher says we are all Americans'. . . She stood and began to recite, in a monotone, 'I pledge allegiance to the flag'" (*PO*, 133). Juan is outraged, and points to the indelible fact of their racialized alienage: "You are an American with that black face? Just because your name is Rubio does not mean you are really blond," he chides his daughter (*PO*, 133).

For Juan, the Rubios are blonde only in name. Despite his upward mobility, he sees the stark realities of racism. For Richard, on the other hand, "Rubio" names the prospect of identification with an Americanism racialized as white. There is a sense that Juan's expertise does not obtain in the United States: his son prefers (all indications to the contrary) a white horse over a brown one. While Villarreal does not go so far as to indict Richard for his preference, he does present in the figure of Juan an alternative perspective, refusing the appeal of Richard's desire. In the end, Juan leaves his family for Pilar, exhorting Richard to "be true unto yourself, unto what you honestly believe is right. And, if it does not stand in your way, do not ever forget that you are Mexican" (*PO*, 169). That tenuous phrase ("if it does not stand in your way") qualifies not only Richard's Mexicanness, but also Juan's. For it is clear that his idealized return to Mexico will not now be realized.

The Pachuco subculture that Richard encounters represents a different variation on "brown power" from that of his father. In the vein of his queer wanderings, Richard socializes with pachucos without identifying with them. There is affiliation but not filiation in this relationship. For his analysis of these new friends is markedly detached:

They had a burning contempt for people of a different ancestry, whom they called Americans, and a marked hauteur toward México and toward their parents for their old-country ways. The former feeling came from a sense of inferiority that is a prominent characteristic in any Mexican reared in southern California; and the latter was an inexplicable compensation for that feeling. They needed to feel superior to something, which is a natural

thing. The result was that they attempted to segregate themselves from both their cultures, and became truly a lost race. (*PO*, 149)

He analyzes their language, dress, and mannerisms, as though undertaking an anthropological study of “newcomers” who become “the object of his explorations,” while crafting his own self-presentation in order to appeal to theirs. “He also bought a suit to wear when in their company, not with such an extreme cut as those they wore, but removed enough from the conservative so he would not be considered a square” (*PO*, 151-2). For them, he is a “traitor to his ‘race’” (*PO*, 151). But he does not see a shared lineage, looking at one point upon his newfound friend, Rooster, with an estranged admiration: “He wondered what errant knight from Castile had traveled four thousand miles to mate with a daughter of Cuauhtémoc to produce this strain” (*PO*, 156). There is no evidence that Richard sees himself as a product of this colonial history of appropriation and rape. Even as he joins Rooster’s company, he maintains the prerogative of his own difference.

Now the time came to withdraw a little. He thought it would be a painful thing, but they liked him, and their friendliness made everything natural. He, in his gratefulness, loved them for it.

I can be a part of everything, he thought, because I am the only one capable of controlling my destiny Never—no, never—will I allow myself to become a part of a group—to become classified, to lose my individuality I will not become a follower, nor will I allow myself to become a leader, because I must be myself and accept for myself only that which I value, and not what is being valued by everyone else these days (*PO*, 152-3).

Richard does not desire a “place apart” (in Sedore’s formulation). Rather, he wants to “be a part of everything.” To my mind, this universalism is the sign of his individuality. As Villarreal declares in the paragraph preceding, “life was too short for him to be able to do the many things he still must do” (*PO*, 152).

It might well be an exaggeration to read this as a *manic* desire on Richard’s part. Of all the brown characters I have considered so far, Richard is in many ways the most measured. He has a cool appraisal of his experiments in identification and a clear sense of what moves he must make next. But the subsequent action of *Pocho* indicates something of the hold this desire has on him. For despite Richard’s plan to break away from Rooster and his friends, he remains identified with them. Although he is in the company of his school classmates, he is brutally targeted by the police and singled out as a pachuco, an outsider. The detective accuses him of a nearby attack against a white woman, purportedly raped by Mexicans. “How do you know they were Mexicans?” Richard responds, “did she see their birth certificates? Maybe they were Americans?” (*PO*, 161). For the detective, their Mexicanness is apparent: “You know what I mean when I say Mexican, so don’t get so Goddamn smart”; “she saw them” and “said they were Mexican, that’s how we know” (*PO*, 161). But Richard wants the detective to look past his apparent racialization to the “American” inside. He asserts his empirical nativity: I was born here and therefore I am an American. But he is increasingly aware that he finds himself in this situation precisely because what he asks of the detective is impossible. Even once he is vindicated, the detective can only see him as one of “his people” as he invites Richard to join the police force because (in his words) “someone like you would be good to have on the side of law and order” (*PO*, 162).

This is a watershed in Richard's development. "Now, for the first time in his life, he felt discriminated against" (*PO*, 163). But he does not ultimately choose to identify with his "people," refusing to relinquish his willful Americanism. There is an irony in Richard's Cartesian insistence: "I want to learn, and that is all. I do not want to be something—I *am*" (*PO*, 64). For *Pocho* exposes precisely this lack of learning. Richard's insistence that he is American because he is born in the United States, despite all appearances to the contrary, exposes the mania of his mixed identifications. The end of the novel finds him on his way out, having enlisted to fight in the war with the knowledge "that for him there would never be a coming back" (*PO*, 187). But this upsurge of patriotism rings hollow. For the only semblance of refuge he can find for himself, the only place that he can "strive to live" in the end, is in the deathly arena of war (*PO*, 187).

In his reading of *Pocho*, Saldívar also draws attention to these gaps between the figure of Richard and Villarreal's aesthetic project. "In contrast to Juan's existential nostalgia and the metaphysical tone of Richard's anguished resolution of cultural conflict, the novel, with its generic ties to the real, hints at a decidedly more material solution to the plight of the *pocho*," he argues, suggesting that we read Richard and the novel more broadly "as a preliminary step in a dialectic of a developing protopolitical understanding," that "the historical phenomenon of cultural consciousness expressed by later Chicano writers can become a reality only after Richard postulates his own identity as a new and different source of personal, cultural, and political consciousness."¹¹⁸ Saldívar argues that Richard reinterprets his father's idealist concept of history as a materialist concept: "the necessary logical step after this *interpretation* of the world is to *change* the world."¹¹⁹

Whereas Saldívar finds in Villarreal's characterization a burgeoning Chicanismo, I read Richard as part of a genealogy of mixed identification that does not necessarily have this revolutionary end. Villarreal's self-positioning, not to mention his subsequent writings, do not bring about the "change" Saldívar foresees. Despite the fact that the Chicano movement was instrumental in reaffirming *Pocho's* significance, Villarreal continues to have a vexed relationship to Chicanismo. As Martínez and Lomelí write, "Villarreal has had a heavy cross to bear. Solitary in the 1950s, he would be discovered by his own people in the 1970s, only to be criticized for what he had written, and for not being in accordance with the historical sensibility of the decade. After the obscurity of the 1960s, Villarreal had a bittersweet encounter with Chicano literary criticism of the 1970s. The result has been a constant espousal of art against the politics of the age."¹²⁰ In his 2001 interview, Villarreal still identifies with the figure of the *pocho* (although he does not use the term as such). "Chicanos thought that I was a traitor to the cause," he says, offering his own explanation as to why: "I believe they view me as a traitor because I don't perform as they would have me in either my writing or my personal life. But I don't perform things that I do not believe in. And I certainly do not believe that, just because we are Mexican-Americans, we deserve special rights."¹²¹ His preference for this hyphenate identity is played out in his life. He completed *Pocho* while in Mexico in 1956 and ultimately became a Mexican citizen, although he still spends time in Santa Clara.

Villarreal's more recent novel, *Clemente Chacón* (1984), suggests a very different future for *pochismo* than the one Saldívar envisions. "He, Clemente Chacón, was Horatio Alger, even if he *was* Catholic and brown. But he was not brown. In fact he was quite fair, and as he passed his hand over his thinning hair, he was for once happy that his father had been a Spaniard," Villarreal writes.¹²² *Pocho* presages this new brown character. The personification of Horatio Alger, Chacón is nonetheless anxious about his racialization: he admits to being "brown" only insofar as he is "fair."

The Cosmic Race

In *La Raza Cós mica* (1925), José Vasconcelos famously describes America as “the cradle of a fifth race into which all nations will fuse,” the “Cosmic Race” comprising “the four great contemporary races: The white, the red, the black, and the yellow.”¹²³ He offers a characteristic formulation of *mestizaje*. In Joseba Gabilondo’s gloss, “only the *hybridization* of the four races that constitute . . . the human species (red, yellow, black, and white), will yield the utopian human being predicated by modernity.”¹²⁴ The absence of “brown” from among the four contemporary races suggests that this might even be a prophecy of the browning of the Americas: an amalgamation of “all of the above” that is at the same time “none of the above,” a *fifth* term that exceeds the previous four.

This is a vision of America that is not only broader than the United States but that entails a specific critique of whiteness. Vasconcelos attended school in Texas for a time, while his father worked as a customs inspector at Eagle Pass, an experience that might well have shaped his sense of U.S. racialization. For the “Cosmic Race” issues from “increasing and spontaneous mixing,” directly contrasted to “the inflexible line that separates Blacks from Whites in the United States, and the laws, each time more rigorous, for the exclusion of the Japanese and Chinese from California.”¹²⁵ Although his promotion of “Latinism against Anglo-Saxonism” is clearly racialized, Vasconcelos is careful to imagine a future in which “the harsh law of domination by the blond-haired Whites” will be prevented from taking hold.¹²⁶

It is not surprising that this text found an audience among Chicanos in the United States. First published in Spain and then in Mexico in 1948, it would come to shape ideas about “La Raza” with its publication in the United States in 1979. As the introduction to the 1979 edition by Didier Jaén points out, Chicanos found “an exaltation of their own values in this concept of the Cosmic race, and identified with it the concept of ‘La Raza,’” discovering “the same possibility of exaltation that it offered the Mexicans and the rest of Latin America when it first appeared.”¹²⁷

This chapter explores a different fate for the “Cosmic Race” than that of “La Raza.” I am interested in other modes of “exaltation”: whether Williams’s exuberant new world historiography, or Villa’s metaphysical erasure, or Villarreal’s encompassing protagonist. These constitute a genealogy of *pocho* power, the powerful allure of figurations of majoritarian identification for minority subjects. At one point, Sedore describes the “Villarreal pocho” as “a veritable Fifth man”: “anaphonic, beyond voice, out of focus, beyond attachments. He is beyond labels—neither Mexican nor American, neither Mexican American nor Chicano.”¹²⁸ In my view, Richard is not beyond attachments but beholden to them. As I argue above, we are dealing with a proliferation of cathexes, exemplified by the queering of desire within the text.

There are important elisions within this field of majoritarian identification. Put differently, the “Cosmic Race” is not as prodigious in its scope as it appears to be. As Weise argues, “a celebration of race mixing, or *mestizaje*, coexisted with a positivist emphasis on cultural whitening” among Mexicans in the South; “‘Mestizophilia’ and the idea of a Mexican mestizo ‘cosmic race’ had their roots in the late Porfiriato, and contained the promise of whitening Mexico’s Indians, promoting their dissolution into a national mestizo identity, and excluding blackness altogether.”¹²⁹ González also points out that “the Latin American paradigm of *mestizaje* (racial miscegenation) . . . simultaneously celebrates Eurocentricity and whiteness (veiled in claims to voluntary cultural

syncretism) and metaphorically exploits—even rapes—the engendering significance of the dead, anonymous indigenous woman.”¹³⁰

My readings build upon these hemispheric theorizations of *mestizaje* in order to excavate the mixed identifications that arise at sites of liminal racialization in minority immigrant literature. Brown characters “whiten” American history at the expense of black and indigenous histories. This is precisely the power of the *pochó* paradigm, insofar as it gets taken up by broad audiences as “representative” of minority identity. The “Fifth Man” is not only *not* the foundation of a radical revolutionary critique but might well be a figuration of minority conservatism. We are dealing with a manic universalism that is deceived as to its own scope. Insofar as brown characters speak United States, they represent the obverse of Martí’s revolutionary view of “Nuestra América” from the other side.

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1. Pedro Juan Labarthe, *The Son of Two Nations: The Private Life of a Columbia Student* (New York: Carranza, 1931), 16.
 2. Labarthe, *The Son of Two Nations*, 57.
 3. Labarthe, *The Son of Two Nations*, 44, 47.
 4. Labarthe, *The Son of Two Nations*, 96.
 5. José Martí, *Our America: Writings on Latin America and the Struggle for Cuban Independence* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977), 89, 94.
 6. Rafael Pérez-Torres, “Refiguring Aztlán,” in *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature*, ed. Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 106.
 7. Raúl Coronado, “A World Not to Come: Latina/o Literary History and Modernity” (working paper, TransAmerican Studies Working Group, Stanford University, May 4, 2010), 14.
 8. For an overview of traditional Chicano historiography that locates 1848 as a point of origination, see Gilbert G. González and Raul A. Fernandez, *A Century of Chicano History: Empire, Nations, and Migration* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 11, 24n53, 59. González and Fernandez complicate this perspective, arguing that we need to attend to the period after this initial expansion and its effect on the development of a Chicano minority within the United States.
 9. Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 129.
 10. Gilbert G. González, *Culture of Empire: American Writers, Mexico, and Mexican Immigrants, 1880-1930* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 9.
 11. Frederick Simpich, “The Little Brown Brother Treks North,” *Independent* 116, no. 39 (1926): 238; quoted in González and Fernandez, *A Century of Chicano History*, 84.
 12. González, *Culture of Empire*, 129.
 13. E. San Juan, Jr., *From Exile to Diaspora: Versions of the Filipino Experience in the United States* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 5.
 14. Vicente L. Rafael, “White Love: Surveillance and Nationalist Resistance in the U.S. Colonization of the Philippines,” in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham, NC: Duke

University Press, 1993), 185.

15. Yen Le Espiritu, *Filipino American Lives* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 46.

16. Manuel Buaken, *I Have Lived with the American People* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1948), 71.

17. Lorrin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in Twentieth-Century New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 69.

18. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 53.

19. Ian Haney López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*, 10th anniversary ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 43.

20. Katherine Benton-Cohen, *Borderline Americans: Racial Division and Labor War in the Arizona Borderlands* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 7.

21. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 54.

22. Benton-Cohen, *Borderline Americans*, 7.

23. David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 15, 20, 13.

24. Benton-Cohen, *Borderline Americans*, 15.

25. *LULAC News* 1, no. 9 (April 1932): 7; quoted in Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 74.

26. Julie M. Weise, "Mexican Nationalisms, Southern Racisms: Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the U.S. South, 1908-1939," *American Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (September 2008): 752, 772.

27. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors*, 35.

28. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 109.

29. For an overview of the Filipino struggle for citizenship, see H. Brett Melendy, *Asians in America: Filipinos, Koreans, and East Indians* (Boston: Twayne, 1977), 46-57. On the broader transformation of the Filipino immigrant from "Colonial Subject" to "Undesirable Alien," see Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 96-126.

30. Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*, 3.

31. Gary Y. Okihiro, "Colonial Vision, Racial Visibility: Racializations in Puerto Rico and the Philippines during the Initial Period of U.S. Colonization," in *Racial Transformations: Latinos and Asians Remaking the United States*, ed. Nicholas De Genova (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 37. Note that Okihiro also contrasts the racialization of these two groups: the "very visible racialization" of Filipinos in contrast to the "invisible racialization" of Puerto Ricans (37).

32. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 115. San Juan, Jr.'s caution against exaggerating the Americanization of Filipinos is relevant here (San Juan, *From Exile to Diaspora*, 5).

33. "Know Your Fellow American Citizen from Puerto Rico," (Washington, DC: Office of Puerto Rico, n.d.), Paul Schuster Taylor Papers, MSS 84/38, Carton 41, Folder 30, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

34. López, *White by Law*, 153.

35. James Creelman, *Diaz, Master of Mexico* (New York: D. Appleton, 1911), 17; quoted in González, *Culture of Empire*,

79.

36. For more on Ozawa's arguments in favor of his eligibility for citizenship, see López, *White by Law*, 56-61.

37. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 5; Claire Jean Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," *Politics & Society* 27, no. 1 (March 1999): 108.

38. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 109.

39. E. San Juan, Jr., *After Postcolonialism: Remapping Philippines-United States Confrontations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 13, 15.

40. Oscar V. Campomanes, "The New Empire's Forgetful and Forgotten Citizens: Unrepresentability and Unassimilability in Filipino-American Postcolonialities," *Critical Mass* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 147. San Juan, Jr. similarly cautions against the tendency that "easily converts the 'Phillippine' half into a routinized ethnic phenomenon, normalized and taken for granted" (E. San Juan, Jr., "In Search of Filipino Writing: Reclaiming Whose 'America'?", in *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, and Interventions*, ed. David Palumbo-Liu (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 215). See also N. V. M. Gonzalez and Oscar V. Campomanes, "Filipino American Literature," in *An Intereethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. King-Kok Cheung (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), which addresses the unique position of Filipino America as neither "ethnic" or "Asian American," nor "postcolonial" or "Third World" (63).

41. Allan Punzalan Isaac, *American Tropics: Articulating Filipino America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 6, 7.

42. Isaac, *American Tropics*, 1.

43. Isaac, *American Tropics*, 16.

44. William Carlos Williams, *Imaginations* (New York: New Directions, 1970), ix (hereafter cited in text as *IM*).

45. Peter Schmidt, "Colonial Romance: Williams's Dark 'Supplying Female,'" *William Carlos Williams Review* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 88. For a comprehensive study of Williams's background, see Julio Marzán, *The Spanish American Roots of Williams Carlos Williams* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

46. Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 150, 151, 158, 149 (citing Gorham B. Munson, *Destinations: A Canvass of American Literature Since 1900* (New York: J. H. Sears, 1928)).

47. Lisa Sánchez González, *Boricua Literature: A Literary History of the Puerto Rican Diaspora* (New York University Press: New York, 2001), 43, 47.

48. Hugh Witemeyer, ed. *Pound/Williams: Selected Letters of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams* (New York: New Directions, 1996), 34.

49. This reading of the gaze of the "Gipsy" is informed by a lecture by Lyn Hejinian on September 25, 2006.

50. William Carlos Williams, *In the American Grain* (New York: New Directions, 1956), 109 (hereafter cited in text as *AG*).

51. Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 90, 83.

52. González, *Boricua Literature*, 44. For a reading of Williams as a visionary historiographer who "constantly disrupts the possibility that any one interpretation or reading of the past might gain authoritative status," see also Bryce Conrad,

- “The Deceptive Ground of History: The Sources of William Carlos Williams' *In the American Grain*,” *William Carlos Williams Review* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 30.
53. Schmidt, "Colonial Romance," 79, 80. For more on the “native female principle” in *In the American Grain*, see also Bryce Conrad, “Engendering History: The Sexual Structure of William Carlos Williams' *In the American Grain*,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 35, no. 3 (Autumn 1989): 255.
54. Michaels, *Our America*, 32.
55. González, *Boricua Literature*, 53.
56. González, *Boricua Literature*, 45.
57. North, *The Dialect of Modernism*, 161.
58. North, *The Dialect of Modernism*, 160.
59. William Carlos Williams, *Yes, Mrs. Williams: A Personal Record of My Mother* (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1959), 116 (hereafter cited in text as *MW*).
60. William Carlos Williams, “Letter to an Australian Editor,” *William Carlos Williams Review* 17, no. 2 (Fall 1991): 12.
61. Williams, “Letter to an Australian Editor,” 12.
62. José Garcia Villa, *Footnote to Youth: Tales of the Philippines and Others* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933), 301 (hereafter cited in text as *FY*).
63. Nerissa Balce-Cortez and Jean Vengua Gier, “Filipino American Literature,” in *New Immigrant Literatures in the United States: A Sourcebook to our Multicultural Literary Heritage*, ed. Alpana Sharma Knippling (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1996), 78.
64. Eileen Tabios, ed., *The Anchored Angel: Selected Writings by José Garcia Villa* (New York: Kaya, 1999), 171.
65. E. San Juan, Jr., *The Philippine Temptation: Dialectics of Philippines-U.S. Literary Relations* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 178.
66. San Juan, *The Philippine Temptation*, 188-89, 200.
67. San Juan, *The Philippine Temptation*, 173, 185.
68. Denise Cruz, “Jose Garcia Villa's Collection of 'Others': Irreconcilabilities of a Queer Transpacific Modernism,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 55, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 14.
69. San Juan, *The Philippine Temptation*, 191.
70. Tabios, *The Anchored Angel*, 130. Entitled, “The Contemporary Short Story,” this text was originally published in *Prairie Schooner* and *Graphic* in 1936.
71. San Juan, *The Philippine Temptation*, 190.
72. San Juan, *The Philippine Temptation*, 194, 195.
73. San Juan, *The Philippine Temptation*, 206.
74. San Juan, *The Philippine Temptation*, 206.

75. José Garcia Villa, *Selected Poems and New* (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1958), 106.
76. Villa, *Selected Poems and New*, 233-34.
77. José Garcia Villa, *Have Come, Am Here: Poems by José Garcia Villa* (New York: Viking Press, 1942), 41, 79; Villa, *Selected Poems and New*, 153.
78. Tabios, *The Anchored Angel*, 132.
79. Carlos Bulosan, ed. *Chorus for America: Six Philippine Poets* (Los Angeles: Wagon and Star, 1942), 36, 37.
80. Carlos Bulosan, *America is in the Heart* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973), 189.
81. For a recapitulation of readings of the assimilationist Americanism text, see, Meg Wesling, "Colonial Education and the Politics of Knowledge in Carlos Bulosan's 'America is in the Heart,'" *MELUS* 32, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 55-77. Wesling points to "the assimilationist drive of the text; its triumphant refrain that '*We are America!*' can be seen as a confirmation of the identity between self and nation that marks the height of the inclusive discourse of liberal democracy" (56-7).
82. Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*, 99.
83. Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*, 273.
84. Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*, 313.
85. Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*, 326.
86. Augusto Fauni Espiritu, *Five Faces of Exile: The Nation and Filipino American Intellectuals* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 66, 68.
87. Susan Evangelista, "Carlos Bulosan," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography: Asian American Writers*, ed. Deborah L. Madsen (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005), 13.
88. Buaken, *I Have Lived with the American People*, 293.
89. Buaken, *I Have Lived with the American People*, 295.
90. On prevalent classifications of races into "white," "yellow," "black," "red," and "Malay, or Brown," see López, *White by Law*, 4.
91. Buaken, *I Have Lived with the American People*, 306.
92. Buaken, *I Have Lived with the American People*, 33.
93. Bienvenido Santos, *You Lovely People* (Manila: Bookmark, 1991), 70.
94. Susan Koshy, *Sexual Naturalization: Asian Americans and Miscegenation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 13, 101. For more on Primitivist nativism against Filipinos, see Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 109-16.
95. Buaken, *I Have Lived with the American People*, 116.
96. Buaken, *I Have Lived with the American People*, 332.
97. Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*, 202. Bulosan tracks various developments in the citizenship campaign waged by the Committee for the Protection of Filipino Rights in the context of the war (*America is in the Heart*, 284-5, 290-1,

- 318-19).
98. Tabios, *The Anchored Angel*, 134.
99. Tabios, *The Anchored Angel*, 134.
100. Tabios, *The Anchored Angel*, 135.
101. San Juan, *The Philippine Temptation*, 209.
102. Tabios, *The Anchored Angel*, 136.
103. Julio A. Martínez and Francisco A. Lomelí, eds. *Chicano Literature: A Reference Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1985), 421. See also Ramón Saldívar, *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990) who explains that “*pocho*” is “a pejorative Mexican term for an ‘Americanized’ Chicano” (61).
104. Arturo Madrid-Barela, “Pochos: The Different Mexicans, An Interpretive Essay, Part I,” *Aztlan* 7, no. 1 (1977): 52.
105. José Antonio Villarreal, *Pocho* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), 165 (hereafter cited in text as *PO*).
106. Timothy S. Sedore, “‘Everything I Wrote was Truth’: An Interview with José Antonio Villarreal,” *Northwest Review* 39, no. 1 (2001): 79.
107. Madrid-Barela, “Pochos,” 51.
108. See respectively Saldívar, *Chicano Narrative*, 65; Tomás Vallejos, “José Antonio Villarreal,” in *Dictionary of Literary Biography: Chicano Writers*, ed. Francisco A. Lomelí and Carl R. Shirley (Detroit, MI: Gale Research, 1989), 284; Raymund A. Paredes, “Special Feature: The Evolution of Chicano Literature,” *MELUS* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1978): 94. For a useful recapitulation of the critical controversy around *Pocho*, see Timothy S. Sedore, “Solace in Solitude: An American Adamic Alienation and José Antonio Villarreal’s *Pocho*,” *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 11, no. 2 (2000): 240-1.
109. Ramón E. Ruiz, “On the Meaning of Pocho,” in *Pocho* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1970), xii.
110. José David Saldívar, *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 112.
111. Saldívar, *The Dialectics of Our America*, 110.
112. Sedore, “Everything I Wrote was Truth,” 78.
113. A. Robert Lee, “Decolonizing America: The Ethnicity of Ernest Gaines, José Antonio Villarreal, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Shawn Wong,” in *Shades of Empire: In Colonial and Post-Colonial Literatures*, ed. C. C. Barfoot and Theo D’haen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993), 278.
114. Sedore, “Solace in Solitude,” 257, 256.
115. Sedore, “Solace in Solitude,” 257.
116. Saldívar, *Chicano Narrative*, 62.
117. Saldívar, *Chicano Narrative*, 60.
118. Saldívar, *Chicano Narrative*, 69, 65, 70.
119. Saldívar, *Chicano Narrative*, 67.

120. Martínez and Lomelí, *Chicano Literature*, 430-1.
121. Sedore, "Everything I Wrote was Truth," 81, 79.
122. José Antonio Villarreal, *Clemente Chacón* (Binghamton, NY: Bilingual Printing Press, 1984), 8.
123. José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race / La raza cósmica* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 18, 39.
124. Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race*, 107.
125. Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race*, 19.
126. Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race*, 10, 25. On Vasconcelos's "strong dualism between the Anglo-Saxon Protestant and the Ibero-American Catholic worlds," see Claudia Sadowski-Smith, *Border Fictions: Globalization, Empire, and Writing at the Boundaries of the United States* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 12.
127. Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race*, xv, xvi.
128. Sedore, "Solace in Solitude," 255.
129. Weise, "Mexican Nationalisms, Southern Racisms," 752, 753.
130. González, *Boricua Literature*, 45.

Chapter 4

BROWN SKIN BLUES Claude McKay and Paule Marshall's Stories of Success

In a 1938 issue of *The Black Man*, Marcus Garvey contrasts African American and Afro-Caribbean consciousness.¹ The African American, “buffeted by the highest and best of industrial, commercial, and even political civilization,” is “the natural leader of all the Negroes of the world,” he writes.² Garvey acknowledges that the history of white and black Americans is a history of oppression and violence, but he has great faith in the capacity of black Americans to work to advance themselves and the black diaspora. By contrast, the black West Indian is not invested with the same power and influence:

The West Indian Negro is still clamouring in the dark. This is due to the fact that he has not yet won for himself the honour of really being a true representative of the Negro race. Probably this is due to no fault of his in the inception of a peoples outlook in life. Before the emancipation, chattel as he was, he was not called upon to think for himself. When he was emancipated the emancipators arrogated to themselves the right to think for him, and in their thinking they cunningly sought to make him a European in thought rather than a Negro in fact. He has grown up with this European idea, though black, he is white, and so the West Indian Negro has grown up without a consciousness of himself.³

This lack of self-consciousness is expressed in the form of a paradox: “though black, he is white.” Garvey points out that this paradoxical identification is the outcome of European slavery and colonization, which has succeeded physical enslavement with intellectual enslavement. As he puts it in another issue of *The Black Man*, the West Indian has “developed more of the white psychology than of black outlook.”⁴ Whether or not his assessment is accurate, it is clear that Garvey attributes a mixed identification to the black West Indian that threatens his own vision of transnational black federation. The “black outlook” is hindered by the “white psychology” of the colonial West Indian subject, schooled in European thought and ideals. Garvey is hopeful that once retrained by those who “realize the difference of race,” the black West Indian will unite with the cause of black self-determination around the world.⁵

I am interested in this mixed identification of Afro-Caribbean consciousness as both “black” and “white,” particularly as it travels to the United States in the first half of the twentieth century with Afro-Caribbean immigration. Is the black immigrant attributed a similarly liminal consciousness, one that blurs the “difference of race”? In what way do brown characters function as intermediaries between black and white America? These tensions are registered in the groundbreaking anthology of the Harlem Renaissance, *The New Negro* (1925). By the time of the anthology’s publication, a transnational black population had converged in the cities of northern United States. Approximately 85,000 West Indians came to the United States between 1900 and 1930, settling primarily in Harlem and Brooklyn.⁶ Most hailed from Jamaica and Barbados, spurred by economic and natural crises and oppressive colonial regimes.⁷ Census data indicates that the number of “foreign-born blacks” increased from 20,000 to 74,000 between 1900 and 1920.⁸ New York became the crucible of the great migration, encompassing not only Caribbean arrivals but also

the northward movement of African Americans answering the demands of war industry and labor shortages. Contributors to the anthology were not unaware of the recent passage of the 1924 Immigration Act or of the success of Lothrop Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Color* (1920), which argued for immigration restriction in order to maintain white supremacy in the United States. The editor of *The New Negro*, Alain Locke, was at pains to deflect this nativist attack. He claims that the "wider race consciousness" to which the anthology testifies "is a different thing from the much asserted rising tide of color."⁹ Other contributors also parry nativist critique by describing this black migration as quintessentially American. Paul Kellogg, for instance, casts these migrants in the vein of the Pilgrim forefathers and Westward frontiersmen before them, while Melville Herskovits testifies to their Americanism: "Why, it's the same pattern, only a different shade!"¹⁰ W. A. Domingo's essay, "Gift of the Black Tropics," discusses Afro-Caribbean immigration in particular. He portrays West Indians as "pioneers and shock troops to open a way for Negroes into new fields of employment."¹¹ They are a model minority, upwardly mobile yet radical in spirit. "Like the Jew, they are forever launching out in business," Domingo writes, describing a "hard-working and frugal" folk.¹²

These writers struggle to honor what they perceive to be the inception of a transnational black consciousness while circumventing nativist ire. In so doing, they put pressure on the terms of newness by which the "new Negro" comes into being. Is this black migration new or old? It is perhaps both—the same pattern but a different shade, as Herskovits indicates. Within this shade, furthermore, there are pluralities of shades. For the Afro-Caribbean immigrant straddles the genealogy of old world Southern and Eastern European immigration as well as the genealogy of forced migration and enslavement of Africans in the new world.

Domingo's comparison of West Indians to Jews, which helps to produce this liminal position, is noteworthy but not exceptional. Sociologists have long been fascinated by the reputation of West Indians as "black Jews."¹³ The question is whether or not there is a "Black Success Story," as the subtitle of a recent study asks.¹⁴ The upward mobility of Afro-Caribbean immigrants provides fertile ground for testing the foundational thesis of the Chicago School of Sociology that held out the promise of assimilation for all immigrant groups. At issue is the relationship between race and ethnicity in the United States. As Michael Omi and Howard Winant have shown, the "immigrant analogy" that assumes the continuity of European and non-European immigration is in fact false and represents a misguided "will to pound the square peg of race into the round hole of ethnicity."¹⁵ Afro-Caribbean immigration has been a test case for determining whether racism limits class mobility or whether the American dream is indeed colorblind in its scope. Afro-Caribbean immigration occupies a liminal position in the United States, in excess of black and white racialization on the one hand and racialization and ethnicization on the other. In effect, this immigration represents the possibility of the triumphal erasure of racism in the United States—the promise of an egalitarian American dream. While there has been much debate about the reasons for the relative success of West Indian immigrants in comparison to African Americans, scholars generally agree that the "black success story" has been historically exaggerated: while West Indians do have a labor market advantage over African Americans, this difference is due to a more complicated set of structural factors than previously understood.¹⁶

Literature is often used as testimony in the context of these sociological debates. For instance, Mary Waters, in her seminal study of West Indian immigration, explains how she recommended Paule Marshall's novel of Barbadian immigration, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), to a student in order to help her better understand her parents; at the same time, she criticizes use of the text as

“social science’ data” by an earlier generation of scholars who drew erroneous conclusions about African Americans by contrast to West Indians, attributing black poverty to behavioral and cultural factors rather than structural and historical factors.¹⁷ Here, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* is potentially useful for the individual student, who might be able to affirm her personal family history by relating it to the group history of Afro-Caribbean immigrants. But its broader relevance is fraught: the book is too easily co-opted by scholars attempting to justify their own racist assumptions.

In my view, Marshall has more to say to the dilemma posed by the purported West Indian “success story” than sociology discovers. We need a hermeneutic for reading the brown characters that people Afro-Caribbean immigrant literature. In this chapter, I study the work of Marshall as well as Claude McKay, who are both part of a distinct yet related genealogy of immigration. Born in 1889 in Clarendon parish, McKay left Jamaica for the United States in 1912, going on to spend a large portion of his life (from 1922 to 1934) in Europe and North Africa. Part of a relatively prosperous family, but with a sure sense of black working-class solidarity, McKay balked at the privilege of the “brown,” light-skinned, Jamaican middle classes, and refused to play the intermediary after a distasteful period of work as a police constable. Marshall, on the other hand, is a second-generation immigrant, born in Brooklyn in 1929 to parents who immigrated from Barbados. Inhabiting the immigrant success story to a limited extent, while coming of age during the Black Arts Movement, Marshall is well aware of the unities and rifts of black consciousness. In effect, both writers understand the appeal of mixed identification but are also deeply skeptical of it. They people their work with brown characters that not only enable, but also expose, the “black success story.” They engage with this story in all its dimensions, as an exaggerated yet powerful social fiction that their writings not only reproduce but also crucially undermine.

The first section of this chapter focuses on Claude McKay’s *Gingertown* (1932), a neglected volume of short stories rife with “near-white” characters that have thus far been inassimilable to his broader canon. In the next section, I relate my analysis to McKay’s well-known novel, *Home to Harlem* (1928), exploring his puzzling use of “brown” terms to describe the life of Harlem. The third section analyzes Marshall’s *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, focusing on the brown character of Silla Boyce, particularly her manic desires and their extension in her daughter, Selina.

These texts have had a tenuous relationship to African American letters, much the same as their authors. McKay is recognized as something of a “rebel sojourner” within the Harlem Renaissance, to use Wayne Cooper’s memorable phrase.¹⁸ Upon his return to the United States in 1934, McKay was accused of being a “spiritual truant” and charged with being out of touch with and having betrayed the vanguard of black thought.¹⁹ *Gingertown* has received almost no critical attention so far. All but ignored for almost two decades until it was republished by the Feminist Press in 1981, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* is now hailed as a major work of American literature. But it continues to be difficult to reconcile with Marshall’s later writings, *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969) or *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983), in which figures such as Merle Kinbona and Avey Johnson return to the Caribbean and to the challenge of forging transnational black feminism. By contrast, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* presents us with the figure of Silla Boyce, a Barbadian immigrant living in Brooklyn in the 1930s and 1940s who seeks to realize the American dream of white immigrants before her by claiming ownership of their brownstone homes. Patricia Saunders, for instance, uses the novel to shed light on the broader “deportation” of West Indians from black American feminist theorizing.²⁰ However, the growing focus on transnational blackness has brought renewed attention to both writers in recent decades, and to the specific contributions of Afro-

Caribbean immigrants to American literature.²¹ Nuanced readings of McKay and Marshall have developed in this context, readings that acknowledge their pioneering visions of transnational black identity while at the same time finding these visions to be fractured or incomplete. For instance, Brent Edwards points out that McKay's "vagabond internationalism" does not straightforwardly cohere: referring to *Banjo* (1929), he argues that "the most emphatically transnational black novel of the interwar period, is paradoxically also a radical critique of black internationalism."²² Gavin Jones attributes the relative lack of critical attention to *Brown Girl, Brownstones* to the fact that "Marshall exposes not so much the possibilities as the problems of establishing a unified black consciousness in a world riven by competing definitions of the self."²³ These fissures are a point of departure for my inquiry. How does brown character impede or inspire black solidarity? How is the brown fantasy of upward mobility entwined with and distinguished from black transnational aspirations? How are brown characterizations and black identifications transformed by one another?

Finding Gingertown

Recent scholarship on McKay has positioned him as an architect of black transnationalism. Through readings of Ray, the Haitian exile in *Home to Harlem*, critics have situated McKay's work at the interstices of African American and Caribbean studies and at the vanguard of postcolonialism.²⁴ *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* are often read jointly with one another, buttressed by McKay's own linkage of these two novels through the figures of Jake and Ray who appear in the first novel and are briefly reunited in the second. For Michelle Stephens, the nascent critique of the national romance plot of *Home to Harlem* finds a proper sequel in *Banjo*, "McKay's successful attempt to write a transnational story of the race," as McKay abandons the black woman who emblemizes domesticity for queer, mobile circuits.²⁵ Gary Holcomb develops this argument in his reading of McKay's "diaspora cruising."²⁶ To these two novels, Holcomb's research adds a third: "Romance in Marseilles," an unpublished manuscript that McKay composed around the same time. In Holcomb's words, these three novels form a "transgressive black anarchist triptych" in which each text "is dependent on the other dialectically to enunciate the author's revolutionary literary program."²⁷

It is difficult to find *Gingertown* among these readings. After McKay wrote *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, he returned to a set of short stories he had begun in the mid-1920s. He had left Marseilles for Morocco in the year that *Home to Harlem* was published and had settled in a village in Tangier, where he would write *Banana Bottom* (1933) as well. Collected under the title, *Gingertown*, his stories were published in the spring of 1932. The collection met with favorable reviews but sold poorly, given the onset of the Great Depression. Despite the fact that the circulation and popularity of *Gingertown* was limited, especially when compared to the success of McKay's earlier novels, it is surprising how little attention this volume has received by critics beyond a brief mention here and there. To be sure, the collection is set in a palpably transnational space that is resonant with McKay's other work. "Gingertown" refers explicitly to a township in what appears to be Jamaica. But taken together, the stories are insistently itinerant, perhaps due to their piecemeal composition. In addition to the Caribbean location of *Gingertown*, the stories range across Harlem, a port city in the Mediterranean that is reminiscent of Marseilles, and a fortified Arab city that might well be Tangier. These are sites of various transgressive interclass and interracial desires. Most notable in these contexts is McKay's dramatic rendering of brown characters who are conspicuously absent elsewhere. They represent majoritarian desires that are difficult to reconcile with the achievement of black

internationalist consciousness in McKay's other work. *Gingertown* develops the predicament of the majority-identified minority subject, as indicated by the title of one of the stories: "Near-White." In this sense, "Gingertown" can be read as "brown" town, a space within McKay's archive in which brown characters thrive. By and large, these characters do not make their way into what Edwards evocatively describes as McKay's "transnational flotsam community."²⁸ They are the detritus of the detritus, and they deserve critical attention in their own right.

We arrive in "Gingertown" halfway through the collection in a story entitled "The Agricultural Show." Told from the perspective of the young Bennie, the story centers around a village fair organized by Bennie's brother, Matthew, that eventually draws the support of the inhabitants of nearby Gingertown and the attendance of the governor himself. McKay unfolds a complex web of social relations in the course of his narration, encompassing town and country; Jamaicans and Americans; white, brown, and black folk; the rich and the poor; and the governor and the people. It is predominantly a story of the parvenu: Matthew, most obviously, who does "big work in that little village of black people" and proves "his talent for getting along with big people."²⁹ But there are others as well: Madam Daniel, one of few African Americans in the area, and committed organizer of the show, who forces her way onto the male-only platform at the center of the fair and demands to be seated; the Andrys, having "pushed up out of the black-and-brown peasant people," now occupying an uneasy seat in high society as a result of their propertied privilege; and the Glengleys, white plantation owners of uncertain pedigree, trying to secure their position in respectable circles (*GT*, 172). The agricultural show, burnished by Bennie's eager vantage, becomes the vehicle for all of their ambitions. There are no great dramatic turns in the story. Instead, we are given an accumulation of small events that build up to the day of the show itself. The highlight for Bennie is when he wins first prize in a contest for his clay sculpture. And the denouement involves the perusal of photos: Matthew with Governor and member of Legislature, and so on. In conversation with his mother over the photos, Bennie reminds her that she too had the opportunity to curtsy to the governor. She gently upbraids him: "it is nothing to lose your head about . . . [t]he Bible said, Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hand to God" (*GT*, 191). But it is unclear whether her wry critique has registered in Bennie's response: "Yes to God, mammy. Good God!" (*GT*, 191).

Little happens in this story, yet a great deal is revealed. McKay displays the complexity of Caribbean social relations, the various stratifications of race and class that would have shaped his upbringing. As scholars have shown, hypodescent, or the "one-drop rule" did not structure race relations in the Caribbean as it did in the United States. There is a significant middle-class in the Caribbean ranged along a continuum from black to white. "To be white was to enjoy privilege in all its forms," Milton Vickerman writes; "to be black, by definition, meant degradation; while coloreds experienced an uncomfortable melding of privilege (*vis-à-vis* blacks) and disenfranchisement (*vis-à-vis*) whites."³⁰ Whiteness signifies more broadly in this context, "in the very existence of a separate mixed-race group; and in the fact that the lighter skinned and more wealthy of these individuals could become 'white.'"³¹ Whiteness is unmoored somewhat from race and takes on class and cultural connotations, as the common phrase "money whitens" connotes.³² "Race is more of a continuum in which shade and other physical characteristics, as well as social characteristics such as class position, are taken into account in the social process of categorization," Waters points out, at the same time cautioning that even though race "was not *determinative* of socioeconomic position (many blacks were in a high position), it was *highly correlated* with it (most high positions were filled with light-skinned blacks or whites)."³³

It is this intermediary position that is understood as “brown” within the Caribbean, and Jamaica in particular. Deborah Thomas’s ethnography is particularly illuminating in this respect, for she explores how “brown” folk straddle the production of a “creole vision of Jamaicanness, consolidated by political and intellectual elites at the time of independence,” over and against “a racialized vision of citizenship” that she calls “modern blackness,” based in popular, working-class culture.³⁴ From the very beginning, Thomas positions herself as a “*browning*” subject, a term that “references a light-skinned female and usually connotes at least a middle-class background.”³⁵ Jamaican use of the term “brown” and its variants entails precisely this concatenation of race and class: “the middle class,” “the more fortunate,” the “rich people,” the “upper sets,” are variations on brownness, which is, in Thomas’s words, “as much a way of life as it is a phenotype.”³⁶ This “brown” segment emerges as a legacy of slavery, “seen as having originated from the free colored offspring of plantation owners and their slave concubines” and ultimately “as the most creole of Jamaicans” who consolidated their power throughout the mid-twentieth century as a cadre of middle-class professionals at a remove from the black, working-class majority.³⁷

But mixed identifications exceed mixed racialization, as one fascinating interview suggests. Matthew is “a self-described racially ‘mongrel’ artist” who lives in “Mango Mount,” the pseudonym for a rural community near Kingston that is the site of Thomas’s fieldwork.³⁸ In his estimation of the various social strata of Mango Mount, a retired civil servant is “black” but “really brown, but occupationally, he’s not brown, he’s a farmer”; a Lebanese-Jamaican man is “brown, not ‘Syrian’”; “there’s no real distinction between being ‘Syrian’ or ‘white’ or ‘Chinese’ or whatever”; an Indian woman is seen as “white” because “she’s married to a brown man, and because she was born in England”; a woman who is “really black” is “brown because she’s married to a brown man and she leads the Anglican church, so her family unit is brown, and therefore middle class, though she didn’t grow up that way”; “this white guy” who does not own a car “is occupationally black, but apparently white, and probably brown, but definitely not middle class.”³⁹ Brownness attaches not only to race but also to class. People who are apparently “black” or “white” can be “brown” and vice versa, depending on their economic status and affiliations. Historically, a series of other groups are implicated in this strata as well, whether South Asian workers and Chinese and Syrian traders linked to the rise of the bourgeoisie in the early twentieth-century or Jewish, Lebanese, and Chinese who consolidated their economic power alongside “brown” Jamaicans in the 1950s with Jamaica’s industrialization program.⁴⁰ It is precisely this array of mixed identification that my project elaborates and contends with in a U.S. context: a racialization that borders on ethnicization, that is less a phenotypic identification than the expression of a structural desire. Thomas’s own ethnographic project represents the increasing imbrication of Caribbean and U.S. racialization. Even as the “increasing socialization of American racial ideologies . . . have inscribed ‘brown’ people into the category ‘black,’” Thomas points out, tracing this socialization to the Black Power movement, U.S. racialization is becoming more like that of the Caribbean, suggested in Waters’s estimation by “a wider gulf between middle-class and poor blacks” and “the great lengths to which middle-class blacks go to telegraph their class identity to whites.”⁴¹ This is partly why Afro-Caribbean immigration is so important for my theorization of brown character. I want to make a conceptual argument informed by these historical developments, highlighting the expression of these liminal identifications as they travel to the United States.

As Thomas’s ethnography of Mango Mount suggests, the term “brown” and its variations would have had a specific set of meanings for McKay, who grew up in a relatively prosperous family.

Winston James registers the uniqueness of McKay's position: "In the islander's color scheme, which obtains to this very day, the McKays would be called 'black,' as opposed to not only 'white,' but also 'light skinned or 'brown.' One of the reasons the McKays stood out was the fact that they were black *and* relatively well-off, indeed prosperous."⁴² In contrast to the bulk of the black peasantry, McKay was raised in relative comfort. When he left Jamaica, his father owned at least one hundred acres of land, a sugar mill, as well as his own boiler and sugar house, most of which he willed to McKay upon his death.⁴³ Partly under the guidance of his brother, part of a new revolutionary class of educated black Jamaicans, McKay grew up with a sure sense of black solidarity, affirmed by his brief experience working with the Jamaican constabulary. James points out that McKay would have "encountered at close range the vicious species of colorism and class snobbery that the 'brown' (light-skinned) middle class carried on in both Spanish Town and Kingston"; his "unhappy experience in the force pushed him to what we may call an openly black nationalist position where he felt part of the black masses of his Jamaica."⁴⁴

The mentorship of Walter Jekyll must have helped forge the links between his identifications and his poetics. "It was a contest that Jekyll had outlined for McKay back in 1912," Michael North writes, "the aristocracy and the peasantry in league against the pinched and pinching middle class."⁴⁵ North has compellingly shown how McKay's early dialect verse, and the primitivist framing Jekyll provided, would go on to circumscribe his career as a modernist in American and European contexts. But this verse would also shape his early reception in "brown" Jamaican society. In his posthumously published autobiography, *My Green Hills of Jamaica* (1979), McKay describes how he read for a "Browning Club," named for the study of Robert Browning's verse. He is not heard as a "real poet" and resolves therefore to "write poetry in straight English and amaze and confound them because they thought I was not serious, simply because I wrote poems in the dialect which they did not consider profound."⁴⁶ James comments upon the fact that this memory stayed with McKay for so many years: "he could still hear the patronizing and self-righteous sniggering of the anglophile, brown middle class about his 'dialect' poetry."⁴⁷

McKay comments indirectly upon these experiences in another story in *Gingertown*, "When I Pounded the Pavement," which is based on his service with the Jamaican constabulary. "Being a cop, even though it was for a short time, was one of the few things that I ever did that I profoundly regretted," McKay confessed in a 1932 letter, adding that by "frankly writing" the story "I have expiated."⁴⁸ The narrator is "a son of peasants" who claims "the peasant's instinctive hostility for police people" (*GT*, 211). But he is compelled to enforce a vagrancy law that results in the arrest and public whipping of a rising black politician, thus ruining the latter's career. "This was my first and last case," the narrator writes at the end, quietly but firmly securing his discharge from service (*GT*, 220). Such a marked contrast to Bennie's naive narration, exposes the earlier story even more for what it is—a "show" to be precise. Bennie's mother's comment reveals the fine irony of the circumscribed ambition of the parvenu, who sets his sights on the Governor's favor as though stretching his hand to God. McKay's own black identifications bring him to this critique. But "The Agricultural Show" nonetheless sets the stage for the development of brown character throughout the volume. It maps variegations of racialization and ethnicization in the Caribbean, which in turn shape McKay's renderings of interstitial identification and desire.

Angelina Dove is *Gingertown*'s emblematic brown character. "Near-White" begins with Angelina staring at the sky outside her window at "a crowd of white butterflies" while she listens to a song named "Butterfly" that has become a hit in Harlem (*GT*, 74). Melodramatic associations open

the story: the protagonist's angelic name, her upward gaze, the whiteness of the butterflies, in flight, moving heavenward, and the song itself flitting just outside the frame. "She was pretty, she was twenty. She was Angie Dove. All Harlem admired her," McKay declares (*GT*, 75). Initially destined to marry a prominent Harlem man, her fate takes a different turn when she meets Eugene Vincent at a party. He schools her in racial passing. "You and I, why, we are as white as any of them. Am I not white like any white man you've seen? And you're prettier, Angie, than any of those six girls with wings in that Butterfly song act," he urges (*GT*, 78). When he leaves, she is bitter because the life of Harlem no longer appeals to her. She claims a white kinship, rebelling against the racial segregation that circumscribes her opportunity and mobility: "The city held a vast pleasure-world to which she felt she was entitled like any of the white thousands, entitled by right of feeling, of birth, and by right of color" (*GT*, 81). In due course, she ventures out of Harlem on her own, falling in love with a white man and a white world to which she appears to rightly belong. McKay captures the majoritarian desire of this "heavenly one," as her lover describes her: "She felt a terribly delicious throbbing in her brain, and herself mounting upwards like a feather, like a lovely dream, on waves upon waves of exaltation" (*GT*, 87, 85). But this transcendental vision is brought up short when she begins to think about confessing her racial identification to her lover, who insists on seeing her as "the nicest, whitest little girl" (*GT*, 99). "Supposing it was you, John, with a quadroon girl or octoroon, could you still love her?" she asks, to which he responds that he would "sooner love a toad!" (*GT*, 102). In the end, we find Angie back at her window, the chorus of "Butterfly! Butterfly!" drowned out by a new refrain that closes the story: "A toad! A toad! Oh god! A toad!" (*GT*, 103, 104).

Other stories stage similar climaxes of repudiation and disavowal. "Brownskin Blues" introduces Bess, a famous cabaret singer, who resorts to bleaching her skin after a former lover, Rascoe, calls her a "black sow" (*GT*, 17). Her ambition is clear: "Everybody in Little Africa is skin-bleaching. Near-white bleached lily white! Skin success wu'kin' magic. Yaller skin turn sweet like honey. Brown skin done bleached out yaller. No more chocolate-to-the-bone. For black woman brings hard luck. . . . Just as well to bleach out, too. I'm sure sick o' being black" (*GT*, 19). In "Highball," a rising Broadway star named Nation sings his own version of the "Brownboy Blues" when he is denigrated as a "prune" by his white wife's circle (*GT*, 135, 136). In "Mattie and her Sweetman," Mattie throws out her younger lover after he calls her a "black woman" at a crowded party (*GT*, 63). The narrator explains the gravity of this slander: "For there is no greater insult among Aframericans than calling a black person black. That is never done. In Aframerican literature, perhaps, but never in social life And so Aframericans have invented pretty names such as low-brown, seal-skin brown, chocolate, and even prune as substitutes for black. Oh, Blues, Blues, Brownskin Blues: the piano wailed" (*GT*, 63-4). This intonation of the "Brown-skin Blues" resounds throughout the whole text.

Why does McKay give over so much space to this lament? Why do his characters put stock in the "pretty names" of their choosing? Why is their blackness roundly denigrated? In a sense, these portraits are satirical. To be sure, they are drawn with a heavy hand, wooden in their theatricality, their exaggerated desire. Perhaps we are meant to recognize these characters as allegorical, as players in a cautionary tale of near-white desire." Like Bennie, Angelina is not unopposed. Her mother also represents a countervailing posture. Capable of passing, she chooses not to, telling her daughter the story of a woman who was discovered not to be white and so cast out from her family after eleven years of marriage. "But what's the use of selling your birth-mark for a mess of pottage that might

turn bitter-gall in your mouth afterwards,” she asks (*GT*, 94). Her affiliations are clear: “we belong to the colored race. Our feelings and our ties are colored. We will find more contentment being ourselves than in trying to climb in among the lily-whites who’ve done us all sorts of dirt” (*GT*, 96). She gives the lie to upward mobility here. But her voice is largely unheard. Compared to the hyperbolic rendering of her daughter, she cuts a minor figure.

Absent this quiet opposition, *Gingertown* is given over to a bevy of brown characters, to their interstitial and paradoxical desires. These vexed identifications reach a crescendo in “Brownskin Blues” when Bess applies a mixture of salves and lotions to bleach her skin:

The burning pain was almost unbearable. Bess took a sniff of cocaine. . . . She had picked up the habit in the cheap cabarets. But she had never indulged to excess. She took another. . . . Another. . . . And another. . . .

The cabaret was a vast hall, dazzlingly lit up. She was dancing upon a golden table. Barefooted, half naked. Coral beads around her throat and small red plates on her breasts and red bangles on her arms, and round her waist a short hooped thing of golden gauze. Black and white admirers threw money at her feet until the floor was green with dollars. She made a magnificent green mountain. She danced that red “Wicked Wiggle.” The piano was a green elephant with the player on his back. And a great green moon swam round and round Bess, with the grinning drummer sitting on its rim and tapping it with two red sticks. And suddenly an immense jungle sprang up, of giant trees and vines like ropes, golden fruit and leaves all red. . . . A mighty red jungle of blazing trees. Burning, blazing until they were reduced to a mass of strange flowers with red lips and fiery tongues singing all together a blues . . . blues . . . blues . . . blues . . . brownskin blues.” (*GT*, 22-23)

This drug-induced vision is characteristically manic. The cabaret hall opens onto a surreal primitivist landscape. Bess moves at a frenetic pace, and the landscape mirrors her movements. In typical McKay fashion, ellipses proliferate, signaling the limits of her impossible desire. The “burning pain” of Bess’s skin is manifest in flashes of red: plates, bangles, drumsticks, leaves, jungle, and finally a blaze of flowers with lips and tongues joining together in one chorus. In this context, the brushes of green are startling. The floor is “green with dollars” as the audience throws money at Bess, transforming her into a “magnificent green mountain,” alongside a piano turned “green elephant” under a “great green moon.” Remarkably, bleaching turns her green instead of white. Certainly, this is the green of envy. But it is worth noting that even in the phantasmagoric space, where pianos are animalized and flowers are anthropomorphized, Bess is not able to imagine her skin to be white. Instead, she dreams of money and power. Her performance garners social and cultural capital. She is front and center in this scene, the sole object of black and white desire.

The denouement is fiercely tragic. Mania turns to melancholia as Bess finds herself in a hospital, her face disfigured. No longer able to work as a cabaret singer, she is now employed as a scrubwoman. In the end, she finds a dubious redemption when her former suitor, Jack, enters the scene and offers her a home. Unlike Rascoe, who takes up with a lighter-skinned woman, Jack cares for Bess’s “nacheral self” and is willing to accept her despite her disfigurement (*GT*, 30). But she is forced in this moment to give up her autonomy. Whereas she once refused Jack, telling him that she did not want to “settle down again,” that she needed her “own room to be independent in,” she now accepts his offer to be “a housekeeping, home-loving gal” (*GT*, 9, 31). In effect, Bess is delivered

from the pathology of majoritarian identification by the appearance of the right kind of man (John as opposed to Rascoe) who induces her to relinquish her near-white desire. But she must also relinquish her dream of independence, financial and otherwise. Put differently, the narrative cannot imagine an independent future for Bess that is not pathologized. Even this redemption is incomplete. “Good God!” Jake exclaims when he looks upon Bess’s scarred face, unable to hide his dismay (*GT*, 30). Strangely, his words echo those of Bennie at the end of “The Agricultural Show.” To my mind, the exclamation registers the horrors of majoritarian desire and McKay’s critical view of this desire.

This horror becomes apparent in “Truant,” a story that unmistakably overlaps with McKay’s biography. The protagonist, Barclay Oram, rebels against the confines of his increasingly respectable family life. He muses upon his immigration from the West Indies, his pursuit of university education, his initial attraction to Rhoda, their eventual marriage, their four-year old daughter Betsy, and his current work as a railroad waiter to support his family. “Why was he, a West Indian peasant boy, held prisoner within the huge granite-grey walls of New York?” he asks (*GT*, 152). Rhoda is transformed in the course of his reminiscences. He fixates upon her mouth in particular: “the full form of it, its strength and beauty, its almost unbearable sweetness, magnetic drawing, sensuous, exquisite, a dark pagan piece of pleasure . . . How fascinated and enslaved he had been to what was now stale with chewing-gum and banal remarks on ‘social position’” (*GT*, 158). His exaggerated attention recalls the “red lips” and “fiery tongues” of Bess’s vision. Barclay stares down this renewed expression of “brownskin blues” as the pathologized and gendered brown character once again imperils the heterosexual romance. This time, however, the romance is doomed. Barclay leaves wife and daughter, choosing to “start now on the trail again with that strange burning thought. Related to none” (*GT*, 161). His burning vision is an alternative to that of Bess, and of Rhoda—an alternative to their near-whiteness, their desire for upward mobility, for power and privilege. These gendered brown characters are the detritus of McKay’s vision of transnational blackness. *Gingertown* is where they find their place.

McKay’s Lost Brown

There is a striking proliferation of brown denominations in and around *Home to Harlem*. “Chocolate Harlem! Sweet Harlem!” Jake intones, home to “brown-skin chippies,” “chocolate-brown and walnut-brown girls,” “rich-browns and yellow-creams, “one chocolate-to-the-bone, one teasing-brown, and one yellow.”⁴⁹ Harlem is a riot of brown color for Jake: “Brown girls rouged and painted like dark pansies. Brown flesh draped in soft colorful clothes. Brown lips full and pouted for sweet kissing. Brown breasts throbbing with love. . . . Take me home to the brown gals waiting for the brown boys that done show their mettle over there” (*HH*, 8-9). Even *Banjo* looks back to Harlem as to a brown horizon, nostalgic for that “back-home brown-skin Harlem way.”⁵⁰ Thinking back on his experiences in the United States “among the black and brown working boys and girls of the country,” Ray finds that “the ideal skin was brown skin. Boys and girls were proud of their brown, sealskin brown, teasing brown, tantalizing brown, high-brown, low-brown, velvet brown, chocolate brown.”⁵¹ This cascading epidermal schema is difficult to ignore. Why does McKay evoke this litany of brown denominations? Why does he feel compelled to proliferate variations on blackness?

In fact, Jake—last name, “Brown”—spends the bulk of *Home to Harlem* looking for “his little lost brown” (*HH*, 41). She is a prostitute, named Felice (as we later find out). They meet when Jake first returns to Harlem and have one memorable evening together. But he forgets where she lives and

spends the rest of the novel trying to find his way back to her. He pines for her throughout. “I ain’t gwine to know no peace till I lay these here hands on mah tantalizing brown again,” he says, recalling “his little lost maroon-brown of the Baltimore,” “some wonderful brown,” “that cute heart-breaking brown” (*HH*, 27, 41, 211, 281). He is drawn to her from the very beginning, when he discovers that she has returned his money to him: “a little gift from a baby girl to a honey boy!” (*HH*, 16). But in his recollection, she becomes more and more desirable. “That night he had felt a reaching out and marriage of spirits,” he claims (*HH*, 42). His new lodgings seem to him “ordinary” whereas “the room of his little lost brown lived in his mind a highly magnified affair: a bed of gold, fresh, white linen, a magic carpet, all bathed in the rarest perfume” (*HH*, 114). He imagines that he could “go home and be his simple self with” her: “Lay his curly head between her brown breasts and be fondled and be the spoiled child that every man loves sometimes to be when he is all alone with a woman” (*HH*, 212).

Felice is very different from the brown characters of *Gingertown*. The one character who resembles her from that collection is Nation’s first wife Ethel, his “little brown wife” to be exact, a minor figure who is idealized in contrast to Nation’s second wife, Myra, who being white herself brings “the alien white world close to him,” appealing to his majoritarian desire (*GT*, 113). When Myra denounces Nation as a “prune,” Nation remembers his first wife: “She could never have said ‘prune’ and made it hurt him” (*GT*, 138). Felice is similarly idealized. Like Ethel, she will not betray Jake. With her, he fantasizes that he can be “his simple self.” This is not exactly a domestic ideal, although Jake romanticizes the comfort of Felice’s body and her room. As Stephens argues, “Jake and Felice’s status as a national couple resists the domestication or bourgeoisification of their romance.”⁵² Jake never returns to that “highly magnified affair” of his mind. When Jake and Felice are finally united, Jake’s friend’s betrayal forces their hasty departure. They are on the run from their prospective home in Harlem even as *Home to Harlem* closes. They pack up and leave without so much as one backward glance—or one backward glance, to be more accurate. For Felice returns unbeknownst to Jake to fetch one talisman, her “good-luck necklace” as she calls it (*HH*, 339). But for her namesake, or more accurately because of it, Felice is the ideal companion for Jake. She shares the undomesticated enterprise of the vagabond. Unlike the pathologized figure of Rhoda, she will not tie the “truant” down to a life of bourgeois respectability.

Felice’s “little gift” inaugurates a different economy than that of upward mobility signified by brown characterization. There is no gendered pathology of near-white desire here, no trace of the brownskin blues. *Home to Harlem* imagines a “way of life” for the brown “phenotype” (in Thomas’s words) that eschews majoritarian desire. McKay seeks to dispel the specter of mixed identification by creating brown characters who are only outwardly brown. In my view the brown denominations of *Home to Harlem* are incantatory. They are not “pretty names” that are “substitutes” for blackness, as McKay points out in *Gingertown*. Rather, they invoke the possibility of mixed racialization without mixed identification.

How are we to understand this resignification of brown character in *Home to Harlem*? The novel offers a memorable vision of racial stratification that is relevant here:

Ancient black life rooted upon its base with all its fascinating new layers of brown, low-brown, high-brown, nut-brown, lemon, maroon, olive, mauve, gold. Yellow balancing between black and white. Black reaching out beyond yellow. Almost-white on the brink of a

change. Sucked back down into the current of black by the terribly sweet rhythm of black blood. . . . (HH, 57-8)

Stephens reads the “stickiness of this image, flowing neither smoothly nor straightforwardly in a particular direction” as “a perfect metaphor in McKay’s account for the hybridity of black subjectivity and the geographic black world.”⁵³ But how can we understand this puzzle of blackness that calls itself brown? On the one hand, McKay fetishizes the “fascinating new layers of brown” as they crest toward whiteness only to be “sucked back down.” But he is anxious about this flexibility as well, insofar as this vision is informed by the vagaries of Jamaican racialization. He mixes his metaphors here: the rootedness of black life is threatened by the current of its flow. It is precisely this threat that *Home to Harlem* seeks to dispel through its “brown” incantations, freeing mixed racialization from its compromised identifications. Harlem becomes the site where McKay’s relationship to this “brown” Jamaican strata gets reworked.

McKay had his own experience with mixed identification in the United States. His immigrant life initially unfolded in the manner of the “black success story.” First, he attended Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, planning to study scientific agriculture. He then settled in Harlem, married, fathered a child, and tried to run a West Indian restaurant. But *A Long Way from Home* (1937) has a different emphasis. Part One, entitled “American Beginning,” shows McKay committed to purposeful wandering. “I had no desire to return home,” he writes, “I desired to achieve something new, something in the spirit and accent of America. Against its mighty throbbing force, its grand energy and power and bigness, its bitterness burning in my black body, I would raise my voice to make a canticle of my reaction. And so I became a vagabond—but a vagabond with a purpose.”⁵⁴ Vagabondage, and its heir in what Edwards calls “vagabond internationalism,” is McKay’s retort to the “black success story.”

This is the plot that *Banjo*, subtitled the “story without a plot,” would go on to develop. Indeed, the novel is highly contemptuous of the chauffeur whose life is “loathsome to Ray”: “What made the chauffeur so unbearably ugly to him now was that he was trafficking obscenely to scramble out of the proletarian world into that solid respectable life, whence he could look down on the Ditch and all such places with the mean, evil, and cynical eyes of a respectable person.”⁵⁵ Ray cannot abide these upwardly mobile aspirations. Instead he prefers the company of a community of vagabonds, a “*lumpenproletariat*,” as Edwards points out, that aptly inhabits *La Fosse*, or “the Ditch,” in the Vieux Port of Marseilles.⁵⁶

It is no surprise that McKay’s work was not countenanced by his audience. W. E. B. Du Bois’s review of *Home to Harlem* was famously vituperative, claiming that the novel left him feeling unclean and needing a bath.⁵⁷ *Banjo* engendered similarly vicious responses. Under the title “Dirt,” Dewey Jones denounced the “filth, obscenity, vagabondage, pimping, prostitution, panhandling, and more filth” of the text and described it as “the photography of a dung heap.”⁵⁸ McKay’s vision was thoroughly abjected, for he had told the wrong story. As Edwards points out, McKay’s work was considered by critics such as Jones to be “a direct assault on . . . upward mobility and bourgeois respectability.”⁵⁹ He had relinquished the propriety and, more importantly, the burden of proper representation borne by the writers of the Harlem Renaissance. As Stephens points out, in a context where “cultural advancement and class mobility within the United States were seen as more effective steps toward national recognition than the self-determination of the Black Belt,” when there was a prevalent belief in “a rootedness in Harlem, a belief in the steady advance of black life in America

through class mobility, racial integration, and national citizenship,” McKay turned to a “Harlem underworld” that “reflected a certain cosmopolitanism that made the notion of a purer, high-class African American identity unreal.”⁶⁰

McKay’s writings contravened Du Bois’s early program for the Talented Tenth that he famously advanced in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). But they also augured a very different future than the one Du Bois envisioned in *Dark Princess* (1928), a novel that was published contemporaneously with *Home to Harlem*. The protagonist, Matthew Towns, a black college student barred from pursuing a career as an obstetrician, meets the Indian Princess Kautilya who schools him in the significance of black people in world history. Their eventual marriage produces a “brown Messiah,” in William Maxwell’s words, crossing the “vast gulf between the red-black South and the yellow-brown East” that Du Bois envisioned in *The New Negro*.⁶¹ “Du Bois seems to have appreciated that *Banjo* joined *Dark Princess* in leading the fiction of the Harlem Renaissance on the headiest of foreign voyages,” Maxwell writes, pointing to the text’s “withering recalculation of the Talented Tenth’s native odds” (symbolized by Matthew’s resolute departure from the United States).⁶² But there are important distinction between this vision and that of McKay. Edwards points out that whereas “*Banjo* strives to imagine the music that would allow a radical, ‘wandering’ black internationalism to coalesce,” *Dark Princess*, by contrast, represents “a flirtation with a doctrinal elitism, most egregiously in its depiction of Matthew and Kautilya, the would-be royal couple of antiracist global radicalism.”⁶³ Du Bois births a utopian figure, “Messenger and Messiah to all the Darker worlds,” whose patrimony exceeds the bounds of the United States.⁶⁴ But this Messiah is more like the brown characters I have considered so far, with their transcendental and all-encompassing desires.

McKay imagines no such deliverance. One anecdote from *A Long Way from Home* casts some light on his resignification of brown character. Entitled “A Brown Dove Cooing,” one chapter describes an “unforgettable and uninhibited little-brown-jug-from-down-home party with Charlie Chaplin” in Greenwich Village.⁶⁵ With McKay as his intermediary, Chaplin extends an invitation to Hubert Harrison, who brings as a guest the woman who occasions McKay’s characteristically primitivist delight: “Harrison’s brown dove was fluttering in pursuit of Chaplin and filling the room with a crescendo of coo-coo-cooing, just as if she were down home in the bushes.”⁶⁶ McKay retells the experience later on, navigating the spheres of white patronage and black intelligentsia:

I felt sure that none of the whites there had ever before had the pleasure of a brown madam at a bohemian party.

When I told the story of the party to some of the élite of Harlem, I was simply dumbfounded by their violent reaction. They insisted that the Negro race had been betrayed, because a little brown jug from Harlem had provided a little innocent diversion in Greenwich village.

I didn’t know what to say. So I hummed an old delicious ditty of my pre-blasé period: “Little brown jug, don’t I love you. . . .”⁶⁷

Although McKay says little in his response to the reaction of the Harlem elite, his meaning is clear. Where his compatriots find betrayal, McKay finds authenticity. “At this intimate little party there was no white shadow and no black apprehension, no complexes arising out of conscious superiority or circumstantial inferiority,” he writes.⁶⁸ This is the ideal “brown” woman in McKay’s imagination, a

woman who abjures structural desire. She is not tethered to elitist or aristocratic norms of respectability. In effect, McKay disentangles her brown body from what I am calling brown character: although outwardly “brown,” she is the antithesis of mixed identification.

This gendered redemption of brownness does not make its way into McKay’s “vagabond internationalism.” As Stephens points out, *Home to Harlem* has a dual narrative structure: “the domesticated plot of the national romance,” on the one hand, symbolized by Jake’s search for Felice; and “a romance between black men,” on the other hand, instigated by Ray’s entrance upon the scene.⁶⁹ The queer, transnational romance trumps the heteronormative, national romance—especially if *Banjo* is taken to be *Home to Harlem*’s sequel. The pathology of mixed identification is not extended to McKay’s male characters. Jake is unassailable. But even the self-conflicted Ray is not pathologized in the same way as Bess, for instance, despite the fact that they share a similar drug-induced vision. He finds himself in an Afro-Orientalist space, “a young shining chief in a marble palace” surrounded by the trappings of royalty:

And the world was a blue paradise. Everything was in gorgeous blue of heaven. Woods and streams were blue, and men and women and animals, and beautiful to see and love. And he was a blue bird in flight and a blue lizard in love. And life was all blue happiness. Taboos and terrors and penalties were transformed into new pagan delights, orgies of Orient-blue carnival, of rare flowers and red fruits, cherubs and seraphs and fetishes and phalli and all the most-high gods. . . . (HH, 157-58)

In contrast to the lament of the “brownskin blues,” Ray finds “blue happiness” in his reverie. While his delight is by no means lasting, the contrast between these passages reveals the gendered pathology of McKay’s imagination. McKay leaves the brown character in *Gingertown* and presents us with her refined ideal in *Home to Harlem*. Nonetheless, she does not arrive in the transnational space of *Banjo*. When Jake and Ray reunite, we find out that Felice has adopted the trappings of bourgeois life. They are settled in Harlem with a son (Ray’s namesake) as she plots their future investments. Jake says to Ray, “it was no joymaking business for a fellah like you’ same old Jake, chappie, to go to work reg’lar ehvery day and come home ehvery night to the same old pillow. Not to say that Felice hadn’t kep’ it freshen’ up and sweet-smelling all along.”⁷⁰ They have achieved a compromise: as long as he can go abroad he will return. It remains to her to keep this ideal of domesticity alive.

Brown Girls, Brownstones

The brown girl of Marshall’s *Brown Girl, Brownstones* is ostensibly the daughter, Selina. All her life she has had to negotiate the formidable force her mother Silla represents. The novel sets up this contest from the very beginning. The first chapter finds Selina ensconced in the silence of the brownstone: “it was a silence which came when the mother was at work.”⁷¹ From Selina’s limited point of view, Silla is “the” mother, bereft of any possessive relation to her daughter. This is the familiar terrain of the bildungsroman—the child having to formulate her own relationship to the world despite the overwhelming influence of her parent. In Silla’s absence, Selina is free. She rushes headlong through the house and down Chauncey Street across Fulton Park, as Marshall introduces us to the characters of the novel as Selina sees them. When Silla enters into the narration at the end of the first chapter, everything changes. She brings “the theme of winter into the park” and into the

novel (*BG*, 16). Silla represents a threat to Selina's perspective. Her grim judgments hang over the subsequent chapter in the form of epigraphs that mediate our relationship to characters previously introduced from Selina's more generous point of view. Marshall stages this contest between mother and daughter as they both struggle in their own way to define the fictive world of the novel for the reader.

Set in Brooklyn in the 1930s and 1940s, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* centers upon the Boyce family, living in a brownstone at the edge of Fulton Park. The novel takes World War II as its historical backdrop and pivots around the conflict between Silla and her husband, Deighton. Silla sells Deighton's inherited land in Barbados behind his back in order to pay for the brownstone, destroying his hopes of return. Injured in a factory job, then finding temporary solace in the congregation of a local divine, Deighton is deported at the behest of his wife and jumps overboard to his death in sight of Barbados. Silla is eventually able to own her home and become a proud member of the Association of Barbadian Homeowners and Businessmen. Selina emerges out of a long period of grieving for her father only to fasten her desires around the dream of running away to the Caribbean with her lover, Clive. She plans to defraud the Association of its scholarship money for young members in order to fund their getaway. Her plans change after a racist altercation with her friend Margaret's mother, following Selina's successful solo dance recital. Selina refuses the scholarship and sets out for the Caribbean by herself, paying her own way by working on a cruise ship.

Critics have emphasized the dialectical struggle between mother and daughter, who are seen to represent individualism and ethnicity, respectively.⁷² As Martin Japtok argues, Selina "rebels against a communally prescribed ethnic identity and yet comes to a kind of reconciliation with her community," which results in "a reluctant but inescapable hybridity."⁷³ Similarly, Kevin Meehan argues that Selina "is able to reconcile the Caribbean paradigm of racial identity conveyed by Silla and the other Bajan women with the African American paradigm represented . . . by Miss Thompson."⁷⁴ Instead of reading the novel in dialectical terms, involving initial conflict and eventual resolution, I propose we understand Silla and Selina as variations of brown character whose relationship reveals the nature of mixed identification itself. Both women are the "brown girl" of the title, shaped by their relationship to the brownstone house and the dream of upward mobility that it represents. Silla is an archetypal brown character, who represents the single-minded pursuit of this dream. But Selina also has mixed identifications that take the form of her intense attachment to the house. The irony of her planned rebellion is that it confirms her resemblance to Silla: she is most like her mother when she confesses her departure to her mother. In the end, the only rapprochement Selina can effect is that of sameness. If she is to be reborn as other than her mother's daughter, Selina must die a symbolic death.

The opening passage of *Brown Girl, Brownstones* sets the stage for mixed identification within the text:

In the somnolent July afternoon the unbroken line of brownstone houses down the long Brooklyn street resembled an army massed at attention. They were all one uniform red-brown stone. All with high massive stone stoops and black iron-grille fences staving off the sun. All draped in ivy as though mourning. Their somber façades, indifferent to the summer's heat and passion, faced a park while their backs reared dark against the sky. They were only three or four stories tall—squat—yet they gave the impression of formidable height.

Glancing down the interminable Brooklyn street you thought of those joined brownstones as one house reflected through a train of mirrors, with no walls between the houses but only vast rooms yawning endlessly one into the other. Yet, looking close, you saw that under the thick ivy each house had something distinctively its own. Some touch that was Gothic, Romanesque, baroque or Greek triumphed amid the Victorian clutter. Here, Ionic columns framed the windows while next door gargoyles scowled up at the sun. There, the cornices were hung with carved foliage while Gorgon heads decorated others. Many houses had bay windows or Gothic stonework; a few boasted turrets raised high above the other roofs. Yet they all shared the same brown monotony. All seemed doomed by the confusion in their design.

Behind those grim façades, in those high rooms, life soared and ebbed. Bodies crouched in the postures of love at night, children burst from the womb's thick shell, and death, when it was time, shuffled through the halls. First, there had been the Dutch-English and Scotch-Irish who had built the houses. There had been tea in the afternoon then and skirts rustling across the parquet floors and mild voices. For a long time it had been only the whites, each generation unraveling in a quiet skein of years behind the green shades.

But now in 1939 the last of them were discreetly dying behind those shades or selling the houses and moving away. And as they left, the West Indians slowly edged their way in. Like a dark sea nudging its way onto a white beach and staining the sand, they came. The West Indians, especially the Barbadians who had never owned anything perhaps but a few poor acres in a poor land, loved the houses with the same fierce idolatry as they had the land on their obscure islands. But, with their coming, there was no longer tea in the afternoon, and their odd speech clashed in the hushed rooms, while underneath the ivy the old houses remained as indifferent to them as to the whites, as aloof . . . (*BG*, 3-4)

The brownstones are uniform yet distinctive, mournful yet formidable, massive yet squat, conjoined yet discrete. The narration attends to their singular decoration and their rich panoply of architectural styles all the while insisting upon their uniformity. Critics have long noted the centrality of these houses to *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, pointing out that the brownstones are the first characters to whom we are introduced.⁷⁵ They “contain contradiction,” in Jones’s apt phrase, whether that of African American and Afro-Caribbean identity, or individuality and community.⁷⁶ But there is yet another contradiction represented by the brownstone that I would like to address here—the contradiction of race and ethnicity. The brownness of the brownstone is not just a feature of its physical construction but is also a signifier of the mixed identifications I track in my dissertation. In effect, the brownstones are emblematic of brown character: they symbolize the mixed identifications of Barbadian immigrants who seek to claim the genealogy of white immigrants before them.

We get a sense of this vexed lineage in Marshall’s description of the various inhabitants of the brownstones. European and West Indian immigrations converge at the site of the brownstones: “Dutch-English and Scotch-Irish” builders, “only the whites,” following by the “dark sea” of West Indians. This is not an uncomplicated succession, as the word “skein,” with all its entanglements, indicates. The image of the sea unites sea-bound Barbadians with a line of seaworthy travelers who have come from Europe to the United States. But this is a “dark” sea that represents the intrusion of difference. The quiet of the rooms is disrupted, the custom of afternoon tea displaced. “Where European immigrants could,” in Saunders’s words, “‘become white’ after a few generations if they so

chose, black immigrants are identified primarily based on color and are seen immediately as an impending force poised to leave their mark or ‘stains’ on the American landscape.”⁷⁷ Whereas Saunders emphasizes the impossibility of this transformation, the text I would argue stages its precarious possibility. Inasmuch as this lineage is disrupted, it is also prolonged in the “unbroken line of brownstones,” in the “train of mirrors,” in the “vast rooms yawning endlessly one into the other.” There is an overriding sense of “brown monotony”—a shared doom that ironically depends upon what sets the houses apart from one another. It is as though the very specificity of West Indian immigration is threatened by this brown monotony. The “confusion” in the design of the brownstones symbolizes the confused designs of brown character. The brownstone occupies the liminal space between blackness and whiteness, the shoreline of race and ethnicity where “dark sea” meets “white beach.”

The Boyces are quite literally colored by their habitation of this symbolic structure. Roughly halfway through the novel, we are given a picture-perfect image of the family at breakfast one Sunday morning. “This morning the silence was somewhat pleasant, for a shaft of sunlight from the kitchen roved amid the crystal in the china closet, lit the stained-glass wisteria lamp over the table and evoked the faces in the brown-faded family photograph on the buffet” (*BG*, 171). Refracted by the house, a beam of sun illuminates two contrasting images. The photograph has already been introduced at the beginning of the novel by a skeptical Selina who comes upon it while roaming through the house, refusing even then to “believe” this “picture of a neat, young family” (*BG*, 7). At present, the family is on the verge of an argument that begins with Deighton’s refusal to be called “Daddy” and ends with his definitive departure from the house. The ideal representation of family life is unsustainable within the space of the brownstone. Inside its walls, previous generations linger on, whether in “the frieze of cherubs and angels on the ceiling,” “the ghost shapes hovering in the shadows,” “the antiseptic white furniture and enameled white walls,” or in the figure of Miss Mary, a tenacious old servant who lives in an upstairs apartment reciting a dirge of memories of her erstwhile employers (*BG*, 6, 22). The light that illuminates the discolored family photography is refracted by the house itself. The “brown-faded family” is faded precisely by its habitation of this majoritarian structure, by the fact that the family must contend with the ghostly and material remnants of whiteness, its persistence in the very walls, the ornamentation, and the tenancy of the house.

Silla is the only character who is comfortable within this space. Deighton observes her relative ease as he passes “uneasily” through the kitchen, “shaken as always by the stark light there,” in that “strange unfeeling world which continually challenged him to deal with it, to impose himself somehow on its whiteness”; by contrast, Silla stands “easily amid the whiteness, at the sink, in the relaxed, unself-conscious pose of someone alone” (*BG*, 22). She is a brown character through and through: “the” mother, quintessence of immigrant struggle, one of a group of Barbadian women whose “only thought was of the ‘few raw-mout’ pennies’ at the end of the day which would eventually ‘buy house’” (*BG*, 11). Her concern is not whether or not she feels at home in the house but how she can come to own it. Her quest for property and upward mobility makes her a fitting member of the Association of Barbadian Homeowners and Businessmen. She can be said to embody the Association’s credo: “It is not the depths from which we come / But the heights to which we ascend” (*BG*, 220). At a meeting for new members, Cecil Osborne lays out their goals:

We ain white yet. We’s small-timers! . . . But we got our eye on the big time . . .

This then is the Barbadian Association. Still in its infancy. Still a little fish in a big white sea. But a sign. A sign that a people are banded together in a spirit of self-help. A sign that we are destroying that picture of the poor colored man with his hand always long out to the rich white one, begging: "Please, mister, can you spare a dime?" It's a sign that we has a *business* mind! I thank you! (*BG*, 221)

The Association is contingent upon the mixed identifications of Barbadian immigrants. Cecil imagines the transformation of race into ethnicity. His claim, "we ain white yet," suggests that they might yet be, that money can confer the privileges of whiteness, that race can dissolve with class mobility. It is precisely a disavowal of blackness that makes this vision possible, for Cecil insists upon distinguishing the Bajan immigrant from the "poor colored man." When another member of the Association, Claremont Sealy, proposes to include all people of color within the Association immediately following Cecil's speech, the resulting indignation reveals how fragile this distinction truly is. The Barbadians are aware of their asymptotic relationship to whiteness. Their claim to the genealogy of white immigration is not just a result of time and hard work but also entails strategic alliance and dissociation.

Silla has an important gloss on this complex desire. After the official speeches are concluded, she presents her own perspective to the small circle of her friends:

People got to make their own way. And nearly always to make your own way in this Christ world you got to be hard and sometimes misuse others, even your own. Oh, nobody wun admit it. We don talk about it, but we does live by it—each in his own way. . . . We would like to do different. That's what does hurt and shame us so. But the way things arrange we can't, if not we lose out. . . . Take when we had to scrub the Jew floor. He wasn't misusing us so much because our skin was black but because we cun do better. And I din hate him. All the time I was down on his floor I was saying to myself: "Lord, lemme do better than this. Lemme rise!" No, power is a thing that don really have nothing to do with color. . . . No, nobody wun admit it, but people got a right to claw their way to the top and those on top got a right to scuffle to stay there. Take this world. It wun always be white. No, mahn. It gon be somebody else turn soon—maybe even people looking near like us. But plenty gon have to suffer to bring it about. And when they get up top they might not be so nice either, 'cause power is a thing that don make you nice. But it's the way of this Christ world best-proof! (*BG*, 224-5)

We can see her determination to climb to ever greater heights. She is emblematic of the "black Jew," driven by the example of Jewish immigrants who at one point occupied precisely the same liminal position between racialization and ethnicization that the Barbadian immigrants now occupy. But she does not seek to *be* white. In fact, of all the characters in the novel, Silla offers the most penetrating critique of white power. When her friend Iris Hurley expresses a fondness for England during the war, she responds, "But Iris you's one ignorant black woman! . . . What the king know 'bout you—or care?" (*BG*, 69-70). Silla has no false allegiance to the crown. In contrast to Deighton's nostalgic tales of sporting and play during his childhood in Barbados, Silla tells Selina about her own childhood in the "Third Class": "a set of little children picking grass in a cane field from the time God sun rise in his heaven till it set" (*BG*, 45). She has a clear analysis of colonial oppression in Barbados: where

“white people treating we like slaves still and we taking it. The rum shop and the church join together to keep we pacify and in ignorance. That’s Barbados” (*BG*, 70).⁷⁸ She is sharply critical of Deighton’s romanticized dream of return. He has grand plans for building a dream house on his newfound inheritance, with beautiful gardens, formidable columns, and extensive furnishings. “Everything gon be white!” Deighton intones (*BG*, 86). But Silla impugns this performance of whiteness: “got to play like he’s white”; “gon build all this fancy house like white people”; “[a] show!” (*BG*, 82, 114, 175).

Unlike Deighton, Silla is not interested in playing white. Instead, she believes that the world “wun always be white.” She wants to supplant whiteness by claiming white property. For Silla, the corruptive effects of power are colorblind. She denies not only race solidarity but also the structural significance of race. As long she accepts “the way things arrange,” she too will rise. Power will change hands, irrespective of race, but power structures will remain the same, conspiring to keep others down. Her ambition prefigures postracial discourse, anticipating a future in which white power has declined but structural oppression continues to exist. In effect, she has a trenchant critique of white power structures, but not of structural power itself.

The complexity of Silla’s character has not been accounted for by extant paradigms. Critics have read her as a blues figure, lacking the fulfillment of self-expression. Trudier Harris, for instance, argues that “Silla’s very life is a state of the blues, and her lack of a sustained means of expressing it, either artistically or otherwise, intensifies the complexity of her personality.”⁷⁹ She situates Silla in the tradition of Langston Hughes and Ralph Ellison as a melancholic figure who has no way of transforming her suffering into fulfilling self-expression: “she can only turn the pain inward—to self-destruction and increasing loss of her humanity—instead of releasing it outward.”⁸⁰ In my view, Silla’s mixed identifications are only with difficulty assimilated to the African American blues tradition. In Houston Baker’s foundational account, “the blues matrix” is “a fluid and multivalent network” that “avoids simple dualities.”⁸¹ Although Silla is an ambivalent character, she cannot in any sense be described in such dynamic terms. Nor can she be encompassed by theorists of racial melancholia, such as Anne Cheng, who take racial grief as their primary object.

It is worth clarifying the different meanings of “blues” that are operative here. Baker uses the term to describe black vernacular expression in the United States, comprising a wide range of genres, from work songs to political commentary. Cheng, on the other hand, uses the term to distinguish melancholy from melancholia: “we see that there has always been an interaction between *melancholy* in the vernacular sense of affect, as ‘sadness’ or the ‘blues,’ and *melancholia* in the sense of a structural, identificatory formation predicated on—while being an active negotiation of—the loss of self as legitimacy.”⁸² Her analysis seeks to “extend beyond a superficial or merely affective description of sadness to a deep sense of how that sadness—as a kind of ambulatory despair or manic euphoria—conditions life for the disenfranchised and, indeed, constitutes their identity and shapes their subjectivity.”⁸³ Although she addresses mania briefly, the emphasis of her study is on a cluster of “blues” affect, racial grief being her main focus.

These blues, whether an affective or structural principle, do not adequately characterize Silla. What might it mean to read Silla as brown, rather than blue? To read Silla as a brown character is to go beyond the terminus of melancholia to what can more accurately be described as a manic subject position: triumphant, uninhibited, delusional, pleasurable, hungering for evermore object-cathexes. As Sigmund Freud argues in “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), “the maniac plainly shows us that he has become free from the object by whom his suffering was caused, for he runs after new object-

cathexes like a starving man after bread.”⁸⁴ This vivid metaphor brings Silla’s determined pursuit of property to mind. She represents the illusive, yet powerful, mastery of mania—an unstoppable determination that nonetheless bespeaks desperate need and desire.

Although Silla might well be blue, her cathexis is directed outward, not inward, as would be characteristic of the melancholic subject. When she hits upon her plan to defraud Deighton of his inheritance, she declares her determination publicly at the kitchen table, in front of an audience of her friends. Her aspect is at once fearsome and jubilant. She is “calm, confident, almost smiling in their midst” (*BG*, 75). The description of her resolve is striking:

With that she raised her arms, her body reared, and as she stood there pledging her whole self while the others sat struck silent, the day changed. The early winter sunset stained the sky beyond the pear trees with harsh yet lovely threads of mauve, wine rose, brassy yellow, and the last light reached in long attenuated strips into the kitchen. Shadows were there also, spreading their dark tentacles as the sun thinned. Silla, the barred sunlight and shade on her face, was imprisoned within this contradiction of dark and light. Indeed, like all men, she embodied it. Yet somehow it was more marked in her. Perhaps because the struggle was nearer the surface and more intense. (*BG*, 76)

Silla’s mixed identifications are symbolized by the effect of sunlight and shadow on her face. Marshall presents a striking image of brown character: Silla is at once dark and light, trapped by the compulsions of her manic desire. Her vow is irreversible, ushering in a marked change of day inside and outside the kitchen. She will stop at nothing to “buy house.” This resolve is not only momentous but also efficacious. Her madness for the house drives Deighton to madness, and ultimately to suicide. One by one she evicts her tenants so that she can subdivide the upstairs apartments and take on more renters.

In another remarkable scene, Silla bursts into Miss Mary’s apartment, which is piled high with relics from her past. She upends old boxes, stomps on old paintings, and rips off dusty sheets from old furniture. They are locked in a symbolic struggle, “Silla’s curved fingers drawing the life from Miss Mary, while Miss Mary strained to hold it,” staving off the knowledge that Silla now owns her master’s old house (*BG*, 203). For Silla, Miss Mary is “a living dead,” who “might of pass on and pass away and make room in the world for somebody else” (*BG*, 19). Surrounded by the detritus of the past and caught in the memory of her servitude to the white upper class, Miss Mary is the remnant of class mobility. She represents the failure of the white American dream, a failure for which Silla reserves the deepest contempt. A few months later, Miss Mary dies and Silla’s own dream is ushered in. Indeed, her grand ambition is unstoppable. She rises to ever greater heights in the course of the novel, coming to own her brownstone and eventually setting her sights on the next stop in the upwardly mobile itinerary of Association members—the aptly named Crown Heights.

Although Selina positions herself as her mother’s antagonist, she too represents a variation on brown character. The title announces the assonance of *brown* girl with *brownstones*. The brown girl’s relation to the brownstones produces her mixed identification as brown. We get a clear sense of this mixed identification in the first few pages of the text, which find the ten-year-old girl sitting on the top floor landing of the brownstone:

Suddenly the child, Selina, leaped boldly to the edge of the step, her lean body quivering. At the moment she hurled herself forward, her hand reached back to grasp the bannister, and the contradiction of her movement flung her back on the step. . . .

She rose, her arms lifted in welcome, and quickly the white family who had lived here before, whom the old woman upstairs always spoke of, glided with pale footfalls up the stairs. Their white hands trailed the bannister; their mild voices implored her to give them a little life. And as they crowded around, fusing with her, she was no longer a dark girl alone and dreaming at the top of an old house, but one of them, invested with their beauty and gentility. She threw her head back until it trembled proudly on the stalk of her neck and, holding up her imaginary gown, she swept downstairs to the parlor floor. . . .

As Selina entered, the chandelier which held the sunlight frozen in its prisms rushed at her, and the mirror flung her back at herself. The mood was broken. The gown dropped from her limp hands. The illusory figures fled and she was only herself again. . . . She did not belong here. She was something vulgar in a holy place. The room was theirs, she knew, glancing up at the frieze of cherubs and angels on the ceiling; it belonged to the ghost shapes hovering in the shadows. (*BG*, 4-6)

Much like her mother, Selina is trapped within contradictions. Marshall registers the “contradiction of her movement” as Selina lunges forward at the stop of the staircase only to catch herself on the bannister at the last moment. Like her mother, Selina is beholden to the house. She is literally at the top of the stairs, the symbolic “heights” to which Silla aspires. But her mixed identification takes different form. Whereas Silla seeks to supplant whiteness, Selina seeks to fuse with whiteness. She imagines herself as a member of the white family who lived here before her own. She is “invested with” the ideal of this white family. In fact, she dons the symbolic investiture of whiteness: an imaginary gown, symbol of rank and privilege. But the dream of whiteness is a ghostly dream beyond her reach. It shatters even as she makes her grand entrance into the downstairs parlor and beholds her own reflection. These “ghost shapes” continue to haunt the novel, just beyond the horizon of Selina’s headstrong desire. The “brown-faded family” can only approximate this ideal of “beauty and gentility.” In effect, Marshall renders the impossible desires of brown character: Selina has an asymptotic relationship to whiteness. The dream of whiteness is a ghostly dream beyond her reach.

There is an important distinction here between mother and daughter: Silla’s majoritarian desire is economic, whereas Selina’s majoritarian desire is racial. But this distinction is increasingly blurred as the narrative develops. Selina starts to resemble her mother more and more in her ruthless pursuit of her plan to defraud the Association of its scholarship for young members. Like her mother, she declares her fierce resolve to Clive with a large measure of intrepid pride. Like her mother, she executes her deception masterfully, eventually winning the scholarship as a result of all her tireless efforts on the Association’s behalf. “It’s almost too easy in a way,” she says to Clive, “I want more intrigue, more deception, more duplicity! I want to work harder!” (*BG*, 272). She excitedly voices the manic illusion of control and mastery, all the while deceiving herself as to Clive’s inertia and his lack of willingness to run away with her. “This was the mother’s way!” she realizes, appalled by her resemblance “as someone ruthlessly seizing a way and using, then thrusting aside, others” (*BG*, 247). And yet her desire is irrepressible. Selina has adopted the form, if not the substance, of Silla’s manic attachments.

In the final farewell between mother and daughter, Marshall encapsulates their complex relationship:

Silla's pained eyes searched her adamant face, and after a long time a wistfulness softened her mouth. It was as if she somehow glimpsed in Selina the girl she had once been. For that moment, as the softness pervaded her and her hands lay open like a girl's on her lap, she became the girl who had stood, alone and innocent, at the ship's rail, watching the city rise glittering with promise from the sea.

"G'long!" she said finally with a brusque motion. "G'long! You was always too much woman for me anyway, soul. And my own mother did say two head-bulls can't reign in a flock. G'long!" Her hand sketched a sign that was both a dismissal and a benediction. "If I din dead yet, you and your foolishness can't kill muh now!" (*BG*, 307)

Silla and Selina confront each other for one last time. Even as Selina finally admits to being her mother's child, Silla sees Selina as a version of herself. Her daughter's impending departure recalls Silla's own immigration to the United States. At this moment, they are both brown girls. However, I do not think that this final scene represents the reconciliation of African American and Afro-Caribbean identities, or of mother and daughter. Their sameness does not leave room for rapprochement. In fact, Selina leaves behind a promising model of reconciliation in the Association, which has just begun to allow African Americans to join the ranks of their membership. As Jones points out, "Selina's final alienation from her 'own people' arises, ironically, at the very moment that a hopefully pluralistic definition of black identity comes into being."⁸⁵ There is no reconciliation here, only the impossibility of reconciliation. Instead, Marshall shows us that mixed identifications are insupportable—that it is impossible to compromise with brown character. The novel suggests that any attempt by Selina to engage with Silla and the Association is doomed to reenact the same cycle of manic violence. Selina cannot stay and be other than a "brown girl."

In the end, I read Selina as a brown anti-hero. At the moment of her looked-for triumph, she refuses the Association's accolades. In a scene that recalls her earlier attachments, she lifts up her gown and climbs up onto the stage, facing a "dark sea" of admiring faces. The language of this scene brings us back to the beginning of the novel, to the liminal zone occupied by Barbadian immigrants and to Selina's own attachments to whiteness. Her denial is quiet but firm: "I can't accept the award . . . Oh, not only because I don't deserve it, but because it also means something I don't want for myself . . ." (*BG*, 303). Her refusal is a refusal of the transformation of race into ethnicity.

At the root of her decision is her racist altercation with Margaret's mother, who is jealous of Selina's successful dance performance. In this famous scene, Margaret's mother primly puts Selina in her place: "in those pale eyes," "a well lighted mirror," Selina sees "with a sharp and shattering clarity—the full meaning of her black skin" (*BG*, 289). Later, examining her face in a storefront window, she strikes out against this racist overdetermination: "like all her kinsmen, she must somehow prevent it from destroying her inside and find a way for her real face to emerge" (*BG*, 291). This encounter with what Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) famously calls the "fact of blackness" incapacitates Selina's brown character. It is this dramatic realization that brings into relief the warring influences upon her life: "She was one with Miss Thompson, she knew. . . . One with the whores, the flashy men, and the blues rising sacredly above the plain of neon lights and ruined houses. . . . one with them: the mother and the Bajan women, who had lived each day what she had

come to know" (*BG*, 292-3). When her mother asks "Girl, do you know what it tis out there? How those white people does do yuh?" Silla can acquiesce (*BG*, 306). She sees "the way things arrange" and is able, unlike her mother, to relinquish the mad hold of her deception.

It is no accident that Selina's dance solo is called the birth-to-death cycle. She undergoes a symbolic death that opens up the possibility for her rebirth as other than her mother's daughter. The recital begins with Selina crouched before her audience, in a circle of light. Even at the start of the dance, poised upon the enactment of birth, Selina's eyes are old: "old as they had been old even when she was a child" (*BG*, 281). Marshall's lyrical description brings us back to the beginning of the novel, to the ten-year-old girl sitting on the brownstone staircase with eyes that "were not the eyes of a child" (*BG*, 4). We are presented with the coming of age of a child who was never childlike. Indeed, the dance rushes precipitously to the final dramatization of old age and death. Selina imagines Miss Mary's dying form as her inspiration. It is as though her old attachments to whiteness come to a close with the closing of her performance of death. Selina's brown character meets her symbolic end: the brown anti-hero reaches a fitting anti-climax.

The final scene of the novel brings Selina back to the site of the brownstones. The old buildings are being pulled down to make way for new developments, their interiors cast open to the air. Selina sees "the bodies of all the people she had ever known broken" in "this giant cairn of stone and silence" (*BG*, 310). Is this the end of mixed identification? Upon first glance it seems as though the brownstone, and the dream of upward mobility it represents, is now dead. But the remaining brownstones continue to brave the succession of Puerto Rican and African American tenants: "the roomers' tangled lives spilled out the open windows, and the staccato beat of Spanish voices, the frenzied sensuous music joined the warm canorous Negro sounds to glut the air" (*BG*, 309). And Silla is very much alive, as is her pursuit of upward mobility. As she says to Selina in parting, "If I din dead yet, you and your foolishness can't kill muh now" (*BG*, 307). We are left with a striking image, as though in tribute to her survival: "A solitary wall stood perversely amid the rubble, a stoop still imposed its massive grandeur, a carved oak staircase led only to the night sky" (*BG*, 309). Even amid the ruin, the staircase stubbornly endures, a monument to Silla's stubborn endurance. Nonetheless, there *is* a death, in this final instance—the death of Selina's brown character and her prior attachments. Selina flings upon the wreckage one of two silver bangles that she has had since a child, the legacy of every Barbadian girl. As it falls, the bangle makes a "frail sound in that utter silence" (*BG*, 310). The "silence" is broken by this intimation of utterance. Insofar as mourning creates the possibility for new attachments, this end is also a beginning. We are brought full circle from birth to death to birth as Selina sets out for the Caribbean. In the end, the symbolic death of brown character opens up the imaginative space of black transnationalism that would soon be peopled by Marshall's subsequent works.

Changing Color Line

The title of this chapter registers not only the architecture of the brownstone home and its intimate links with upward mobility, but also the formal complexity of McKay and Marshall's stories of black success. Marshall's characterization of Selina is a fitting conclusion to a study that begins with Ameen Rihani's *Superman of America*. Selina is a brown anti-hero, opposed to the American Superman. She refuses the mania of majoritarian desire. But as she leaves, Selina recalls "Suggie and her violated body, Miss Mary living posthumously amid her soiled sheets, Miss Thompson bearing

her life-sore and enduring, Clive and his benign despair, her father beguiled by dreams even as he drowned in them, the mother hacking a way through life like a man lost in the bush” (*BG*, 307). To the extent that each of these characters, from black to white to brown imbue her with “a small strength,” she represents a conglomerate character (*BG*, 308). Is it possible that Selina allies herself with a majority outside the scope of mixed identification? Can we find a “consistent universalism” (to use Nikhil Pal Singh’s phrase) in this transcendence of brown character?⁸⁶ Does mania give way to a true universalism in the end?

I do not think that Marshall answers these questions, for Selina’s inarticulate utterance is not yet born. It is clear, however, that she must leave the national boundaries of the United States. Her departure is preceded by a recurring nightmare that immediately follows her encounter with Margaret’s mother. She stumbles home and lies in a stupor for a week, trapped each night in the “same dream”:

It awaited her near the end of her sleep and ushered her into a parlor where she wandered familiarly amid the ornate Victorian furnishings until footsteps sounded outside. Terror seized her then, for she realized that she was only an intruder. Frantically, she searched for a window, but found none; nor was there a second door or a closet. In desperation she plunged into the open grand piano, tearing a way through the wires until she reached the street.

But at the piano’s jangling alarm, the others followed, pursuing her through narrow streets where huge factories eclipsed the stars, and filling the low-humming night silence with their execrations. Finally, they gave over the chase to a beast—and he came, huge, silent, swift—a low-slung, dark-furred animal with eyes as innocent as a child’s. She could hear his deep growl and feel his breath on her legs. And there was something appealing in that warm breath. Some perverse part of her suddenly wanted surrender more than escape, and thought with pleasure of the claws ripping the last breath from her throat . . .

She had almost stopped and turned, almost surrendered, when an empty bus loomed in front of her. The folding doors opened. She stumbled in—just as the beast caught her leg, slashing a deep furrow in the calf. The bus door closed on his bloody paw, and sent him tumbling—howling and snapping—into the gutter. (*BG*, 298).

Much is taking place within this phantasmagoric landscape. The piano evokes Selina’s musically-inclined father, the factories her mother’s daily travail. And the footsteps outside are likely those of the ghostly white family that haunts the brownstone. Selina is afraid that they will discover her to be an intruder. The dark animal that pursues her, seems to originate from their misguided perception. She wants to surrender to this overdetermination, but circumstances save her: in this case the bus, and later the ship that will take her away from these confines. No doubt her nightmare has multiple interpretations. But I read it as the nightmare of the American dream—the figuration of blackness left out of brown accounting. To my mind, Marshall suggests that the only way to contend with the disavowal of blackness built into the very structure of the brownstone is for Selina to leave its precincts.

I read Marshall and McKay as keen critics of brown character. They characterize mixed identification if only to open up its critique, representing the appeal of ethnicity for the racialized subject while relentlessly questioning this desire. As Michael Cobb points out, Silla’s characterization “contradicts any dream of racial unity predicated on the colour of one’s flesh.”⁸⁷ But even as brown

characters disclose the limits of racial unity, Marshall and McKay disclose the precariousness of their manic desire, their illusive ambition that lapses readily into despair.

Furthermore, their characterizations help us to understand the limits of the American dream, particularly its utopian vision of a future of colorblindness. By looking ahead to a world that “wun always be white,” Silla helps us to approach the present conjuncture. *A Long Way from Home* ends with a fascinating chapter entitled “On Belonging to a Minority Group.” In it, McKay addresses an unnamed writer, a Southern white woman married to a black journalist, with a young mixed race daughter. He mentions that he has “read an interesting article by her on ‘America’s Changing Color Line,’ which emphasizes the idea that America is steadily growing darker in complexion, and is informing about the increasing numbers of white Negroids who are absorbed by the white group”; to this he responds; “I would suggest to her that vicarious stories of ‘passing white’ are merely of slight importance to the great group of fifteen millions who are obviously Negroes.”⁸⁸ He goes on to denounce those “educated Negroes who believe that the color line will be dissolved eventually by the light-skinned Negroids ‘passing white,’ by miscegenation and final assimilation by the white group,” ultimately calling for the development of “group spirit among Negroes.”⁸⁹

Although McKay dismisses these stories of “passing white,” he makes room for them in his work. His brown characterizations help us to see the other side of this seemingly utopian future, when race will essentially cease to matter. As Lauren Berlant points out, the usual distinction between utopia and ideology does not obtain in the United States where “utopia is both ‘utopia’ and ‘ideology’”: “the utopia-ideology *relation* establishes, instead, a field of social activity within which individual and collective fantasy become, nationally, embodied.”⁹⁰ Rents in this ideological fabric can be described as “anti-utopian,” following Krishan Kumar: “Utopia is the original, anti-utopia the copy—only, as it were, always coloured black”; “nightmare to its dream, like a malevolent and grimacing *doppelgänger*, anti-utopia has stalked utopia from the very beginning.”⁹¹ This is the dark beast that Selina must outrun even as she relinquishes her brown character. McKay and Marshall help us to see the nightmarish relay of utopia and anti-utopia—manic delusion as delusion, the fictive dream of (white) ethnicity and its (black) undoing. Their writings expose the American dream of postracial utopia as it traverses and obfuscates the color line.

1. I use the term “Afro-Caribbean” to refer to black immigrants from the Caribbean and “African American” to refer to black Americans. The term “West Indian” encompasses immigration from the anglophone Caribbean more broadly, following prevalent use of the term in sociological studies. See, for instance, Louis J. Parascandola, ed., *Look for Me All Around You: Anglophone Caribbean Immigrants in the Harlem Renaissance* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 36n1; and Mary C. Waters, *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 19.

2. Marcus Garvey, “The World As It Is,” *The Black Man* 3, no. 11 (November 1938): 20.

3. Garvey, “The World As It Is,” 1938, 20.

4. Marcus Garvey, “The World As It Is,” *The Black Man* 2, no. 3 (September-October 1936): 14.

5. Garvey, “The World As It Is,” 1938, 20.

6. Waters, *Black Identities*, 34-35.

7. For a detailed analysis of natural, economic, and political push factors contributing to emigration from this region,

see Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1998), 9-49.

8. Holger Henke, *The West Indian Americans* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001), 28.

9. Alain Locke, ed., *The New Negro* (New York: Touchstone, 1992), 14.

10. Locke, *The New Negro*, 360.

11. Locke, *The New Negro*, 345.

12. Locke, *The New Negro*, 345, 346.

13. Waters, *Black Identities*, 98.

14. See Suzanne Model, *West Indian Immigrants: A Black Success Story?* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008).

15. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, Second ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 48.

16. For instance, Winston James shows “that the selectivity of the migration, not the supposed ‘culture’ of the migrants, principally accounts for the differential” (Winston James, “Explaining Afro-Caribbean Social Mobility in the United States: Beyond the Sowell Thesis,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44, no. 2 (April 2002): 249). For a useful recapitulation of these debates, see Yoku Shaw-Taylor, “The Intersection of Assimilation, Race, Presentation of Self, and Transnationalism in America,” in *The Other African Americans: Contemporary African and Caribbean Immigrants in the United States*, ed. Yoku Shaw-Taylor and Steven A. Tuch (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007) 3-6; Waters, *Black Identities*, 95-103. Waters stresses the importance of structural factors and the fact that these are “often given stereotypical cultural explanations,” seeking to complicate this reductive correlation; in her words, “even ‘good culture’ is no match for racial discrimination” (140, 8). Model, on the other hand, questions the exaggerated labor market outcomes of the early West Indian immigration, opting instead for the selectivity thesis according to which immigrants represent a self-selected group “endowed with greater ability and drive than those who stay home” (Model, *West Indian Immigrants*, 143). See also, Milton Vickerman, *Crosscurrents: West Indian Immigrants and Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), which asks that we situate West Indian immigration at the juncture of a series of “cross-pressures,” among them, “conservative socialization in societies in which they form majorities and which urge them to downplay race while emphasizing merit” (5).

17. Waters, *Black Identities*, 370, 383n9.

18. See Wayne F. Cooper, *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987).

19. Cooper, *Claude McKay*, 319-320.

20. See generally Patricia J. Saunders, “Woman Overboard: The Perils of Sailing the Black Atlantic, Deportation with Prejudice,” *Small Axe* 13, no. 1 (March 2009): 203-216.

21. See, for instance, Heather Hathaway, *Caribbean Waves: Relocating Claude McKay and Paule Marshall* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), which aims to address “one understudied aspect of difference within racial sameness in the United States” by reading the work of McKay and Marshall (5). *Look for Me All Around You* (2005) is a useful anthology of writings by Caribbean immigrants in the context of the Harlem Renaissance. On Claude McKay and Eric Walrond in particular, see Carl Pedersen, “The Caribbean Voices of Claude McKay and Eric Walrond,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. George Hutchinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). For a brief overview of Anglophone Caribbean-American literature, see Aparajita Sagar, “Anglophone Caribbean-American Literature,” in *New Immigrant Literatures in the United States: A Sourcebook to our Multicultural Literary Heritage*, ed.

Alpana Sharma Knippling (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1996).

22. Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 210.

23. Gavin Jones, "'The Sea Ain' Got No Back Door': The Problems of Black Consciousness in Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*," *African American Review* 32, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 597.

24. For a reading of the Harlem Renaissance as a postcolonial literary movement at the interstices of British, French, and U.S. empire, emphasizing the importance of Ray, see Robert Philipson, "The Harlem Renaissance as Postcolonial Phenomenon," *African American Review* 40, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 145-160. Also, John Lowney addresses the significance of "Ray's narrative of exile . . . within Jake's picaresque narrative," arguing that McKay's rendering of "the West Indian immigrant narrative as a narrative of Haitian exile . . . suggests a common ground for cross-cultural dialogue among African American and Caribbean critics of American imperialism" (John Lowney, "Haiti and Black Transnationalism: Remapping the Migrant Geography of *Home to Harlem*," *African American Review* 34, no. 3 (Autumn 2000): 414, 426).

25. Michelle Ann Stephens, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 169.

26. Gary Edward Holcomb, *Claude McKay, Code Name Sasha: Queer Black Marxism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 5.

27. Holcomb, *Claude McKay, Code Name Sasha*, 19.

28. Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 198.

29. Claude McKay, *Gingertown* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1932), 190-91 (hereafter cited in text as *GT*).

30. Vickerman, *Crosscurrents*, 27.

31. Vickerman, *Crosscurrents*, 44.

32. Waters, *Black Identities*, 29.

33. Waters, *Black Identities*, 29, 154. For an overview of differences in racial categorization across the hemisphere, see Kevin Meehan, "Caribbean versus United States Racial Categories in Three Caribbean American Coming of Age Stories," *Narrative* 7, no. 3 (October 1999): 260-1.

34. Deborah A. Thomas, *Modern Blackness: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Politics of Culture in Jamaica* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 11.

35. Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 16, 299n14.

36. Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 24.

37. Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 51. James's caution is relevant here, that despite the fact that this "brown" class "is renowned for its mimetic pseudo-European culture," it "cannot be written off as having been completely conservative" (James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, 113).

38. Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 100.

39. Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 101.

40. Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 46, 68.

41. Thomas, *Modern Blackness*, 248; Waters, *Black Identities*, 40.
42. Winston James, *A Fierce Hatred of Injustice: Claude McKay's Jamaica and his Poetry of Rebellion* (London: Verso, 2000), 4.
43. James, *A Fierce Hatred of Injustice*, 11, 26.
44. James, *A Fierce Hatred of Injustice*, 50, 72.
45. Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 102.
46. Claude McKay, *My Green Hills of Jamaica* (Kingston: Heinemann, 1979), 86-7; quoted in James, *A Fierce Hatred of Injustice*, 144.
47. James, *A Fierce Hatred of Injustice*, 144.
48. James, *A Fierce Hatred of Injustice*, 77.
49. Claude McKay, *Home to Harlem* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), 14, 3, 8, 105, 236 (hereafter cited in text as *HH*).
50. Claude McKay, *Banjo: A Story without a Plot* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1957), 47.
51. McKay, *Banjo*, 320-1.
52. Stephens, *Black Empire*, 164.
53. Stephens, *Black Empire*, 153.
54. Claude McKay, *A Long Way from Home* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1970), 4.
55. McKay, *Banjo*, 288.
56. Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 201.
57. Cooper, *Claude McKay*, 244.
58. Dewey R. Jones, "Dirt," *Chicago Defender* (July 27, 1929): 12; quoted in Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 200.
59. Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 200.
60. Stephens, *Black Empire*, 133, 134, 136.
61. William J. Maxwell, "Banjo Meets the Dark Princess: Claude McKay, W. E. B. Du Bois and the Transnational Novel of the Harlem Renaissance," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. George Hutchinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 180; Locke, *The New Negro*, 408.
62. Maxwell, "Banjo Meets the Dark Princess," 172, 178.
63. Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 237, 238.
64. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dark Princess: A Romance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 223.
65. McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, 118.

66. McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, 119.
67. McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, 120.
68. McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, 119.
69. Stephens, *Black Empire*, 161, 150.
70. McKay, *Banjo*, 292.
71. Paule Marshall, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (New York: Feminist Press, 1981), 5 (hereafter cited in text as *BG*).
72. For an overview of early criticism of the novel, which reads Selina as an expression of individualism in the lineage of a figure like Stephen Dedalus, see Martin Japtok, "Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*: Reconciling Ethnicity and Individualism," *African American Review* 32, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 306. Mary Helen Washington's afterword to the 1981 edition lays the foundation for reading Silla as a representation of the Bajan community, "the avatar of the community's deepest values and needs" (*BG*, 313).
73. Japtok, "Reconciling Ethnicity and Individualism," 305.
74. Meehan, "Caribbean versus United States Racial Categories," 267.
75. On brownstones as characters within the novel, see Hathaway, *Caribbean Waves*, 90. For a reading of architecture as the fundamental structuring element of the text, see Kimberly Benston, "Architectural Imagery and Unity in Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*," *Negro American Literature Forum* 9, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 67-70.
76. Jones, "The Sea Ain' Got No Back Door," 602. For Jones, the brownstone, along with other images in the novel, is an emblem of black disunity. For Hathaway, the contradiction of the opening pages "implies that individuality can be detrimental to a group needing to cohere in order to survive" (91); for a similar argument, see also Vanessa Dickerson, "The Property of Being in Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*," *Obsidian II: Black Literature in Review* 6, no. 3 (Winter 1991): 3.
77. Saunders, "Woman Overboard," 211.
78. For more on Barbados and how its small ruling class shaped the lack of opportunities for figures such as Silla and Deighton, see also James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, 36-38. Supriya Nair points out that Marshall's own parents could not gain profitable employment in Barbados: "An entrenched white settler class and an emerging national bourgeoisie maintained a stranglehold over the emancipated but virtually landless Afro-Caribbean labor" (Supriya Nair, "Homing Instincts: Immigrant Nostalgia and Gender Politics in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*," in *Caribbean Romances: The Politics of Regional Representation*, ed. Belinda J. Edmondson (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 185).
79. Trudier Harris, "No Outlet for the Blues: Silla Boyce's Plight in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*," *Callaloo* 18 (Spring-Summer 1983): 58.
80. Harris, "No Outlet for the Blues," 58.
81. Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 8, 9.
82. Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 20.
83. Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race*, 23-24.
84. Sigmund Freud, *General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 176.

85. Jones, "The Sea Ain' Got No Back Door," 599.
86. Nikhil Pal Singh, "Culture/Wars: Recoding Empire in an Age of Democracy," *American Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (September 1998): 514.
87. Michael L. Cobb, "Irreverent Authority: Religious Apostrophe and the Fiction of Blackness in Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 631.
88. McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, 348.
89. McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, 351, 350.
90. Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 17.
91. Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford: Basic Blackwell, 1987), 100, 99.

Conclusion

RED, BROWN, AND BLUE

“The New Face of America” graces the cover of a 1993 issue of *Time* magazine. It appears to be the photograph of a brown-skinned woman, with brown hair and brown eyes. But this is a computer-generated image, a composite of different ethnic and racial categories: 17.5% African, 15% Anglo-Saxon, 7.5% Asian, 7.5% Hispanic, 17.5% Middle Eastern, and 35% Southern European. She is touted as “our new Eve”: “a symbol of the future, multiethnic face of America.”¹ This virtual experiment is repeated in many different combinations, producing a matrix of “morphies” who represent combinations of Middle Eastern, Italian, African, Vietnamese, Anglo-Saxon, Chinese, and Hispanic types.² As one contributor notes, “a fundamental recoloring of the very complexions of societies” is underway.³

Indeed, this issue is peppered with the buzz words of multiculturalism, from the “rainbow coalition” to the “global village,” from the “mosaic” to the “hyphen. One article tenders Walt Whitman’s classic line: “Of every hue and caste am I.”⁴ Another looks ahead to a time in which “Native American-black-white-Hungarian-French-Catholic-Jewish-American children will lead the way.”⁵ A millennial optimism attends this future, the prospect of the “Rebirth of a Nation,” as the title of one article proclaims. Intentional or not, the reference cannot help but call to mind D. W. Griffith’s controversial 1915 film, *The Birth of a Nation*, and its racist polity. Are we to surmise that black and white racialization is a thing of the past? That the fundamental violence at the heart of U.S. nation-formation has been overridden by the migrations following? At once progeny and progenitor, the “new Eve” initiates a new beginning whose ends are profoundly unclear.

This issue of *Time* magazine came out in the wake of the 1990 U.S. Census, which projected very high rates of growth among nonwhite minority populations relative to white populations due to immigration and natural increase.⁶ The phrase “browning of America” started to come into popular use during this period, with increasing excitement in marketing and advertising quarters. Barack Obama’s 2008 election is a watershed by all accounts, touted as the end of all barriers to race and the inauguration of a new postracial era in the United States.⁷ Euphoria often attends these projected transformations. As blogger Scott London asks, reflecting on *Time* magazine’s “Face of Tomorrow,” the “question then as now is, will the obliteration of certain distinctions mean the obliteration of identity itself? I don’t think so. I look upon the hybridization of America as a source of great promise. The future belongs to the mestizo, the person who straddles many different worlds and can help explain them to each other.”⁸

And yet, an apocalyptic anxiety seems to heighten with each successive census. Blogger Cynthia Tucker calls this “a fear of minority status” that takes the form of “a backlash against the browning of America,” targeting anyone from Obama to Muslims and Latinos generally and intensifying in periods of economic collapse.⁹ Even the 1993 *Time* issue voices these concerns (despite its generally self-congratulatory tone)—concerns about open-door immigration policies, the disintegration of family values, and the perceived burdens of illegal immigration. We are given a set of familiar headlines in the immigration debate: “III Cheers for the Wasps,” “Not Quite So Welcome Anymore,” and “The Shadow of the Law.”

These anxieties have been compounded in the past decade by the war on terror and its intersection with the ongoing crackdown against undocumented immigration. Mexican and Latino

populations were initially targeted by the militarization of the border and reduction of legal safeguards for immigrants. A new threat was posed by the subsequent attacks of September 11, that of the brown-skinned, Middle-Eastern-looking male, suspected of terrorist activity. The rhetoric of the war on terror has increasingly reframed immigration as a matter of domestic security, collapsing the figure of the “illegal” with that of the “terrorist,” transforming the U.S.-Mexico border into a full-fledged war zone and entailing ever more draconian enforcement and detention policies (ranging from the USA PATRIOT Act to the controversial NSEERS or “Special Registration” program). In this context, a new group of immigrants has been cast together and jointly subjected to legal and extralegal nativist attack. These include primarily Arabs, Latinos, Muslims, Sikhs, and South Asians, notably those figures who cannot be easily classified as “black,” “white,” or “yellow.” As Malini Johar Schueller writes, describing her own experience being pulled aside for a “random security check” at an Atlanta airport, “I looked around and discovered, predictably, that the color of randomness was brown.”¹⁰

It is clear that “America’s color lines are shifting,” as Ellis Cose points out in a 2009 *Newsweek* article.¹¹ Entitled, “Red, Brown, and Blue,” the piece recapitulates a large arc of citizenship in the United States, from a time when naturalization was contingent upon whiteness to the present moment, when mixed race unions are on the rise and people of color are poised to become a majority population. It is a familiar argument that suggests that whiteness will expand, encompassing other minority groups in the manner of Southern and Eastern European immigration at the turn of the century, even as race ceases to matter. In Cose’s words, “race will not be synonymous with destiny. That’s a future worth embracing.”

The contours of this future are becoming clearer as the results of the 2010 Census are tabulated. According to preliminary findings, roughly eighty-five percent of population growth in the last decade is attributable to minorities, primarily Hispanics; and the number of multiracial Americans has increased by twenty percent. “The minority growth share in 2010 is the largest in recent memory, with only the influx of European minority immigrants such as Italians, Poles and Jews in the late 1800s possibly rivaling it in scope,” one demographer claims.¹² This is the second census survey in which respondents have been able to select more than one race. A recent series by *The New York Times* entitled “Race Remixed” has been tracking the fortunes of this mixed-race generation. In advance of the census results, reporter Susan Saulny anticipates “a much more fluid sense of identity,” pointing out that “young adults of mixed backgrounds are rejecting the color lines that have defined Americans for generations.”¹³ There is a sense that “color lines” no longer obtain, that W. E. B. Du Bois’s proclamation at the dawn of the twentieth century is obsolete.

Brooklyn-based rappers Das Racist offer an ironic and suggestive commentary upon this dizzying array of transformations. In a 2009 single, “Who’s That Brown” they call out a question that brownness seems to answer. A litany of hybrid figures follows: “Brown Elvis,” “Brown Larry Bird,” “Mixed-race British chicks,” “Half Choco Taco, quarter Chippewa Indian,” “Black Tintin,” “Jewish Mel Gibson.”¹⁴ They are all crossovers in one sense or another, unexpected combinations in which the production of the song itself partakes, sampling Tribe Called Quest and iconic video-game soundtracks. The music video develops this conceit, as the rappers embark on a quest through a strange landscape that recombines a variety of 1980s era video-game graphics, evading marriage proposals by woman wearing saris, fighting “Yuppie Gentrifiers,” and stealing Pabst Blue Ribbon (“irony beer”) from a local Kwik-e-Mart.¹⁵ Rendered in a mode of free association, “Brown” reads like the name of a taint, or transference. There is no end to brownness: “All brown everything, better

than you've ever seen." Everything is brown, and better for it. But, as with most of Das Racist's work, a cool irony pervades. "Do you like it?" the song asks, "Oh, I think you like it, maybe you should buy it, you should probably buy it," tapping into consumer desire and angst while precisely refusing to signify the sought for object. The refrain is quite possibly borrowed from a 2002 United Parcel Service advertisement campaign: "What can brown do for you?"¹⁶ "Brown" is a brand, readily on offer. We are meant to understand the deployment of brownness rather than brownness itself.

In a telling moment from a *New York Times Magazine* interview, Deborah Solomon asks group members Himanshu Suri and Victor Vazquez to identify themselves: "You jokingly describe yourself as 'Puerto Rican cousins' in a song title, when in fact you are neither Puerto Rican nor cousins. What are you actually?" They parry her attempt to pin them down:

Suri: It's weird. I'm an Indian-American who is participating in a historically black art form, while acknowledging that the experience of South Asians in America has been a relatively easier one than that of black Americans. *Vazquez*: My dad is black and my mom is white, and I don't know if I am neither or both. And we don't have the time to get into the identity-politics discussion that this would lead to. *Suri*: Then what are we doing here? *Vazquez*: We're bigging up our brand so that we can make more money. *Suri*: To buy things. I want to start dressing more like a British colonialist in a red coat and maybe lighten my skin with that money.¹⁷

Their exchange suggests that the "identity-politics discussion" Solomon wishes to instigate would not only be ill-timed but untimely. Instead, they draw attention to the branding of identity, to the consumption of their performance of identity and the interviewer's suspect desire for its actual fact. Suri is careful to acknowledge his own position as a South Asian who is precisely not black. Vazquez claims that he is neither black nor white, or perhaps both. They are participants yet interlopers in what Suri recognizes as "a historically black art form," aware of the relative privilege of their liberal arts education, their familiarity with literary theory as much as pop culture, and their access to the "progressive liberal white America" that they satirize as well as inhabit. "And would we even be on the page of this publication if we had not gone to Wesleyan?" Vazquez asks.

Das Racist captures something of our perplexing conjuncture. There is no one constituency involved in the "browning of America." The phrase not only implicates a diverse set of immigrants from Latinos to South Asians, but also signals the narrowing of the demographic identified as "white," and ultimately evokes the rise of a new generation of mixed-race Americans with no singular racial identification. What is clear from "Who's That Brown" is that it is not clear who that "brown" is. Suri and Vazquez are certainly readable as "brown" in the photograph that accompanies the interview. Their responses indicate that brownness is not coextensive with blackness or whiteness, although at the same time that it partakes of both. There seems to be a visible intimacy shared by the South Asian and mixed race figure, implicating other people of color who are not manifestly "black" or "white." Certainly the varied discourses around the "browning of America" suggest that brownness represents both promise and threat: the utopian vision of a postracial future in which all difference is infinitely multiplied and, ultimately, meaningless, or the dystopia of a nation unmoored of its Anglo-Protestant bearings, of its presumably white foundations.

The "browning of America" can be understood, following Raymond Williams, in terms of "structures of feeling": "all that is present and moving, all that escapes or seems to escape from the

fixed and the explicit and the known.”¹⁸ Implicated in these embryonic coordinates, brownness qua racial formation (while imprecise and volatile) is in a state of being born or realized. As I pointed out in the introduction, critics working in different fields have begun to register this development, whether by locating a “brown style” in Chicano performance, ascribing “feeling brown” to Latinos and other people of color, or studying the gap between black and “brown folk.”

In what is perhaps the only full-length study of the phenomenon to date, Ronald Sundstrom sees in celebrations of the “browning of America” the misguided “hope that new demographic realities in America will solve our old and rancorous racial problems simply by making them irrelevant in a majority Latino, Asian American and mixed-race America. . . . and render pointless ‘old’ black and Native American claims for social justice.”¹⁹ Richard Rodriguez is positioned as “a poetic voice for this popular impulse,” “caught up in the romance of the browning of America” alongside Gloria Anzaldúa and other “delusional” writers guilty of “infantile magical thinking that confuses the gritty realities of politics with soft-focused romantic fantasies.”²⁰ Certainly other critics have read Rodriguez in these terms, particularly since he achieved the status of spokesperson for Hispanic America after the publication of his first memoir, *Hunger for Memory* (1982). Alicia Camacho points out that “Rodriguez’s increased visibility in popular media derived in part from his willful denial of his membership to a Chicana/o collectivity” and also “revealed the limits of civil-rights reforms within the strictures of liberalism and racial capitalism.”²¹ Following *Days of Obligation* (1992), *Brown* (2002) is the third in an autobiographical trilogy whose volumes deal respectively with class, ethnicity, and race, according to Rodriguez’s own schema in the preface to *Brown*. As Ilan Stavans writes in his review of *Brown*, “Rodriguez seldom makes use of political facts”: “He lives in a dreamlike zone, a universe of ideas and sensations and paradox.”²²

But the fact that Sundstrom ranks Rodriguez alongside Anzaldúa is quite remarkable given that Anzaldúa’s work has been foundational for Chicano studies, queer-of-color critique, as well as decolonial feminism, all modes of criticism that are in sympathy with Sundstrom’s own progressive politics. Sundstrom’s heavy-handed approach to this literature leaves something to be desired, to say the least. For “magical thinking” not only mantles all social relations in one way or another but is also the basis of state fantasy.²³ We need to ask what the “browning of America” as an imaginative project affords us at this moment. In effect, we need a literary hermeneutic for reading a figure like Rodriguez today.

My dissertation lays the foundation for this task. I challenge our preconceptions of the ethnic literary tradition in the United States, focusing on a set of recalcitrant texts in the first part of the twentieth century that do not fit neatly within the framework of resistance in which minority literature is generally read. From the heroic Superman of America to the anti-heroic Selina Boyce, the brown characters I trace in my readings emerges in contention with the landscape of black and white racialization, produced by immigrant writers who were not assimilable to this divide. I offer a new comparative framework for thinking about neglected archives of immigrant literature. As I emphasize throughout, I am not trying to classify these writers as brown. Rather, I focus on the production of brown character: a creative contention with racial undecidability. Brown characters are archetypes of mixed identification who do not want to be exclusively minor, who claim varied and complex modes of majoritarian identification. They straddle the boundary of race and ethnicity. These are not the blues figures to which the study of minority literature tends. My work goes beyond the terminus of racial melancholia, emphasizing the mania of the majority-identified minority subject.

Looking back from the vantage of the present, my usage of the term “brown” might well seem anachronistic. But I prefer to think of this as a catachrestic move. In Gayatri Spivak’s words, a catachresis is a “misfit,” “a word for which there is no adequate referent to be found.”²⁴ Catachresis “gives form to what is otherwise unintelligible,” Nancy Bentley points out.²⁵ My research proposes that we read across these broad topographies of immigrant literature the “otherwise unintelligible” predominance of brown character. Brown characters cut across what is usually distinctive here. A common desire is revealed: to concatenate minority and majority identities, however tenuous or moribund or ultimately mad this desire might be. This is the American dream, revived by minority immigrant writers. But this dream has its disenchantments, as my readings show. The screen of whiteness has gaps and inconsistencies. Mania abates. The brown skin blues resound.

This prehistory of mixed identifications, this long and varied suffusion of affect around the idea of “America,” equips us to understand the present conjuncture in which meanings of minority and majority are changing. The linkages between brownness qua race and the mixed identifications of brown character are becoming increasingly intelligible. My work opens up the theorization of these new developments, offering a prehistory for the “browning of America” and the advent of postracial discourse.

There is a structural desire at work here, inseparable from racial desire. Indeed the 1993 *Time* issue is rife with platitudes of the American dream that brown characters hold dear: “industry and success,” “nose-to-the-grindstone maxims of Benjamin Franklin,” and “the Protestant work ethic” that are the supposed legacy of white Anglo-Saxons Protestants, not to mention assurances that all immigrants can “climb that ladder” (“You just have to prove your worth to the group ahead of you to be accepted”).²⁶ The American Dream is not only “the motivating false consciousness of a national/capitalist culture” but an important fantasy, one that “addresses the fear of being stuck or reduced to a type, a redemptive story pinning its hope on class mobility,” in Lauren Berlant’s words.²⁷ Brown characters pin their hopes on precisely this redemptive story, opening up an imagined freedom from the racialized type. They exemplify what Berlant calls the “fantasy of boundless identity” that has structured American utopia from the New England experiment on.²⁸

I am interested in the role that minority immigrant literature has played and continues to play in the creation of this national fantasy. How are writers we dismiss as traitors mobilized for particular ideological ends today? How can we develop a prehistory for the visibly racialized protagonist of the American dream? To what extent does the mania of brown characters, their insatiable hunger for majoritarian identification, find expression in the discourse of colorblindness today? For we are “*brown all*,” as Rodriguez puts it in *Brown*, evacuating brownness of any sense of difference.²⁹ “Browning purports to wash away color consciousness of all sorts with color, hence, it accomplishes the ends of the ambitious conception of color blindness through hyper-color consciousness,” Sundstrom writes: “In short, since color is to be everywhere, it will be nowhere.”³⁰ Difference becomes so ubiquitous as to become irrelevant.

Berlant’s reading of the 1993 *Time* issue is particularly instructive. She argues that its aim “is to teach citizens at the core culture to remain optimistic about the U.S. future, and this requires the ‘new face’ the nation is already becoming not to have a memory;” “the complex racial and class relations of exploitation and violence . . . have taken on the status of mere clichés—that is, accepted truths or facts of life too entrenched to imagine surpassing—by the panicked readership of *Time*.”³¹ The “New Face of America” looks to a “genocidal” future, a future that “sacrifices the centrality of African American history to American culture by predicting its demise,” a future that “sacrifices

attention to the concrete lives of exploited immigrant and native people of color by fantasizing the future as what will happen when white people intermarry, thus linking racial mixing to the continued, but masked, hegemony of whiteness.”³²

Arundhati Roy’s work helps connect this national amnesia to the selective vision of global empire. In a 2004 essay, based on her speech at the World Social Forum in Bombay, Roy tracks the rise of “New Imperialism” and the “New Racism” that it entails. She offers the allegory of the pardoned turkey. Since 1947, she explains, the National Turkey Federation has brought a turkey before the U.S. president. It is a talented bird, especially trained for its public appearance. And this one bird is spared the gruesome fate of fifty million of its brethren across the country. Roy explains its allegorical significance:

That’s how New Racism in the corporate era works. A few carefully bred turkeys—the local elites of various countries, a community of wealthy immigrants, investment bankers, the occasional Colin Powell or Condoleeza Rice, some singers, some writers (like myself)—are given absolution and a pass to Frying Pan Park. The remaining millions lose their jobs, are evicted from their homes, have their water and electricity connections cut, and die of AIDS. Basically they’re for the pot. But the Fortunate Fowls in Frying Pan Park are doing fine. Some of them even work for the IMF and the WTO—so who can accuse those organizations of being anti-turkey? Some serve as board members on the Turkey Choosing Committee—so who can say turkeys are against Thanksgiving? They participate in it! Who can say the poor are anti-corporate globalization? There’s a stampede to get into Frying Pan Park. So what if most perish on the way?³³

Few are spared and elevated at the expense of the many. Theirs is the dream of transcendence, of being saved by upward mobility, of the selective transformation of race into ethnicity. We have here a fantasy of representation that signifies the lack of representation: for these prominent few serve to justify the oppression of all. The brown turkey becomes the exception to the black and white rule of racial oppression, pardoned at the sacrificial altar of the American dream.

Immigrant writers play an important role here, despite their complex allegiances to the contrary. Ameen Rihani would no doubt have balked at his appropriation by George W. Bush in 2008 in Abu Dhabi, not to mention the inclusion of this quotation among a list of “tributes” to the author on the website of the Ameen Rihani Organization.³⁴ A recent U.S. Department of State publication, *Writers on America* (2002), compiles more such testimony as part of its ambition to “illuminate in an interesting way certain American values—freedom, diversity, democracy—that may not be well understood in all parts of the world.”³⁵ In her contribution, “On Being an American Writer,” Bharati Mukherjee is emphatic about this designation. Citing her agent’s suggestion that she write about India rather than the United States, she responds: “That’s the reason, perhaps, that I have clung so fiercely to the notion of my un-hyphenated, mainstream place in American writing,” claiming to be particularly “impatient with hostility from Indian and India-born American scholars in ‘post-colonial’ disciplines who instinctively disparage anything with an American provenance.”³⁶ This is not a question of disparagement but deployment, of understanding how immigrant writers, even those who bridle at U.S. imperialism, might well purvey Americanism to the globe. The “New Face of America” travels abroad. This brown American dream is a dream of empire whose origination and prospects I have thus far sought to understand.

My dissertation constructs a genealogy for this promulgation of mixed identification. I explore this “masked hegemony of whiteness” insofar as it wears a brown face. Brown characters people a discursive space that has not yet been named or analyzed. To bring them into conversation with one another is to begin to account for the widespread appeal of the figure of the majority-identified minority subject, to track its variations while underscoring its ubiquity. The prehistory I chart is particularly relevant today, when racial minorities have become the new spokespersons for the irrelevance of race despite the ongoing entrenchment of racial inequity. In effect, the brown character of the pre-civil rights era (with all his endless striving beyond minoritarian identity) finds renewed expression, coming to represent a postracial advance. Many of the authors I consider are harbingers of this fantasy. My readings show that their work not only presages this postracial desire but also undermines its realization. By exploring the energetic and uncontrollable cathexes of brown characters, we are able to understand the perennial attraction of majoritarian identification for minorities and for narratives of American exceptionalism, which rely on the visibility of brown subjects in order to sustain the fiction of the American dream. To contend with their imagination is to contend with the allure and madness of the end of race.

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