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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Degeneration Nation: The Body, Medicine, and the
Culture of Biofuturity in American Literature, 1883-1928

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

Michelle Ann Stuckey

Committee in charge:

Professor Michael Davidson, Chair
Professor Lisa Cartwright
Professor Stephanie Jed
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Professor Meg Wesling

2010

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2010

DEDICATION

*For my dad, James George Stuckey, who knew how to tell a story.
June 15, 1946 – June 29, 1993*

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Degeneration Nation: The Body, Medicine, and the
Culture of Biofuturity in American Literature, 1883-1928

by

Michelle Ann Stuckey

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

University of California, San Diego, 2010

Professor Michael Davidson, Chair

“Degeneration Nation: Reproduction, Disability, and Biofuturity in American Literature, 1880-1930” disentangles the relationship between Progressive Era American fiction and eugenic science. Specifically, I argue that race, gender, class, and disability converge in the discourse of the degeneration, which, by contesting rigid standards of corporeal and cultural normalcy, represents the threat of difference posed

by people with disabilities, poor people, and ethnic and racial minorities. I contend that as a rhetorical answer to the specter of degeneracy, a culture of biofuturity emerged in the U.S. in the late nineteenth century. I use the term “culture of biofuturity” to capture how literary and cultural production as well as social movements of the Progressive Era imagined a future in which improved social relations were inextricable from the improvement of the body through scientific eugenic reproduction practices that enabled “better breeding.” In “Degeneration Nation,” I read literary works by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Frances E.W. Harper, Pauline Hopkins, Charles Chestnutt, Edith Wharton, and Edith Summers Kelley in relation to contemporary socio-cultural projects of the period, such as the Panama Pacific International Exposition (PPIE), public health initiatives in San Francisco and Panama, post-Reconstruction black uplift movements, eugenic family studies such as Charles Davenport’s *The Hill Folk*, better baby and fitter family contests such as Mary Watts and Dr. Florence Sherbon’s “Fitter Family for Future Firesides,” and the birth control activism of Margaret Sanger. I also discuss medical writing by major medical figures of the period, such as S. Weir Mitchell, George M. Beard, and Miles Vandahurst Lynk. I read literature in conjunction with social and cultural texts in order to contextualize the literary works under study here as participants in complex social activities, as constituted by specific discursive practices and as outgrowths of a specific mode of production, as a means of better understanding the symbolic economies of the texts which govern their possibilities for meaning.

**Introduction: Biofuturity and the
American Literary Imagination, 1883-1928**

In Boston, on the top floor of Harvard's Countway Library of Medicine, resides the Warren Anatomical Museum. The museum's collection, which is perhaps best known for its possession of Phineas Gage's skull, was initially begun by John Collins Warren, a physician and Harvard professor who collected anatomical and pathological specimens for use in his teaching and research. Warren donated his collection to the college in 1847, but it was not until 1861, the year the Civil War began, that the collection first opened to the public. According to the exhibit's wall literature, the collection originated as a repository for "normal and healthy anatomy" but began to attract increasingly more donations of "abnormal anatomy," in part because "preventative medical care had yet to see the popularity it does today, and most physicians saw only chronic and acute cases, and saw only sick or injured patients." The exhibition text indicates that there were two categories of donations, the first, "grotesquely deformed body parts still maintaining some normal physiology," and the second, pathological specimens. The display includes selections from the Boston Society of Medical Improvements collection, such as the skeleton of an acephalous fetus and dried specimens and skeletons of conjoined twins, as well as the Phrenological Collection of Johann Gaspar Spurzheim, which includes a series of casts of heads of intelligent men compared with the "microcephalic" heads of so-called "pinhead idiots."¹

¹ This description of the collection derives from information I gleaned from a visit to the exhibit on April 18, 2008.

In Philadelphia in 1863, the Mütter Museum of the College of Physicians opened its doors to reveal a collection of anatomical and pathological specimens donated by Thomas Dent Mütter when illness forced him to resign his position as professor of surgery at Jefferson Medical College.² The original collection, which he had amassed for use in his classes, included Chief Justice John Marshall's bladder stones and a wax mold of a horn that had previously resided on the forehead of a Parisian widow. In 1865, the museum acquired specimens and photographs of battlefield injuries from the U.S. Civil War. In 1874, the Mütter procured the connected livers of Cheng and Eng, the world-famous "Siamese twins" whence that term derives, and a plaster cast of their torsos that replicates the strip of skin and cartilage connecting them;³ the Joseph Hyrtl collection of 139 skulls, which, according to former Mütter Museum director Gretchen Worden, illustrated "the anatomical variation among ethnic groups"; and the "Soap Lady," a female corpse that had been preserved when the fatty tissue, or adipose, in her body decomposed into adipocere, a fatty wax whose chemical composition is similar to that of soap.⁴ Other collection highlights include the 1877 acquisition of a 7'6" skeleton of a man with acromegaly, or hyperactivity of the pituitary gland; the 1907 acquisition of a

² Gretchen Worden, *Mütter Museum of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia* (New York: Blast Books, 2002).

³ According to an 1874 *New York Times* article, Cheng and Eng Bunker were born in 1811 in a fishing village in Siam (what is now Thailand), two of 17 children. They were purchased in 1830 by Robert Hunter, who exhibited them throughout Europe. Later that year, they arrived in Boston, where they were examined by Dr. John C. Warren (whose collection became the Warren Anatomical Museum at Harvard) to confirm that they were "genuine monsters" and thus fit for exhibition. Warren's examination not only confirmed that they were indeed conjoined but also revealed that they breathed simultaneously. The twins eventually married women who were sisters and bought a cotton plantation in North Carolina, where they owned slaves. Between them, they had 21 children. They died January 17, 1874. "Chang and Eng, the Siamese Brothers," *New York Times*, February 2, 1874.

⁴ Worden, p. 11.

tumor removed from the jaw of President Grover Cleveland; and an extensive abnormal-fetal-development exhibit.⁵

In Washington DC, the Army Medical Museum, which later became the National Museum of Health and Medicine, was established during the war “to increase doctors’ knowledge of what happened when a patient was wounded” through the collection of military medical and surgical specimens.⁶ Museum staff documented the effects of the war on the body of soldiers, and the results of this endeavor were published as *The Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion*, over the course of 13 years from 1870 to 1883. The museum displays many of the items collected during the war in an exhibit titled “To Bind Up the Nation’s Wounds: Medicine During the Civil War,” which contains photographs of bullet wounds, amputations and prosthetic limbs, and reconstructive surgery, especially of the face, for injuries resulting from gunshots. The exhibit displays General Daniel E. Sickles’s amputated leg, which he donated to the museum in 1863 after being struck by a cannonball. According to the exhibit wall text, Sickles often visited his leg at the museum.

I begin with a discussion of these museums, each of which was established and/or made public in the United States during the Civil War, in order to highlight the expanding influence of medical science over cultural perceptions of the body in the post-

⁵ The “teratology” exhibit includes fetuses with cyclopia; neural tube and related disorders such as anencephaly, spina bifida, hydrocephaly; conjoined twins; amniotic deficiency, adhesion, and mutilation syndrome (ADAS), in which the lower body develops abnormally; thanatophoric dwarfism, or the undersized development of lungs and limbs; caudal regression, or the incomplete growth of the body below the navel; and acrania, or the absence of a portion of the skull over the brain. Worden, p. 14.

⁶ This quote comes directly from exhibition wall text, which I noted during a visit to the museum on December 30, 2009. The wall text describes newer exhibits as emphasizing “health, especially individual lifestyle choices that affect health.” Among these newer exhibits is “Empires of Infection: How Smallpox Conquered the World.”

Reconstruction period from 1883 to 1928, which I will refer to as the Progressive Era. As scholars such as Paul Starr, Dana Nelson, and Adele E. Clarke demonstrate, the professionalization of American medicine, which began in the first half of the nineteenth century and coalesced after the Civil War, was accomplished through the systematizing of education and credentialing, the exclusion of alternative practitioners, and the organization of private institutions such as hospitals.⁷ For example, in 1870, only a few hundred hospitals had been built in the United States, the majority of which were more closely affiliated with charity organizations than with medicine. However, by the 1880s, hospitals began to expand and become more directly affiliated with medical care, contributing to a more interconnected, national system of medicine. Medicine more so than other sciences had long held a significant degree of social influence as a result of doctors' administering to individuals in their private, daily lives. However the establishment of the medical museum marked a specific articulation of the field's expanding, public institutional presence and the corresponding increase in its cultural authority.⁸ The institutionalization of the authority of medicine inculcated a growing segment of the population into an ideological discourse on the body that determined how it is defined, how it should look, and how it should be cared for.

⁷ Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (New York: Basic Books, 1982); Dana Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Adele E. Clarke, Laura Mamo, Jennifer Ruth Fosket, Jennifer R. Fishman, and Janet K. Shim, eds., *Biomedicalization: Technoscience, Health, and Illness in the U.S.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

⁸ Following Tony Bennett's work, these museums must be understood as composing one particular facet of what he calls "the exhibitionary complex." Bennett argues that the emergence of institutions of exhibition for art, history, and medical and natural science; national and international fairs; and arcades and department stores signaled a transition to increasingly more public inscriptions of "messages of power." Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," *New Formations*, 4 (1988).

The establishment of these medical museums also signaled an intersection between medical science and public culture through their representations of the body and physical difference. These museums might be understood as an example of what Benedict Anderson calls the “modern culture of nationalism.”⁹ Anderson locates the cultural roots of modern nationalism in the novel and the newspaper, which he argues “made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.”¹⁰ I argue along with Lennard Davis that the formation of modern national identity depended as much upon the standardization and normalization of the body and bodily practices as it did upon language and literature.¹¹ The medical museums offered visual representations of abject subjects of the national community—bodies affected by disability and illness but also bodies that were racially, sexually, or in other ways “non-normative”—against which visitors could measure their own degree of bodily health and, by extension, social normalcy. Of course, the displaying and exhibiting of non-normative bodies did not begin in second half of the nineteenth century. In her cultural genealogy of freakery, Rosemarie Garland Thomson locates the origins of the display of bodies in curio cabinets and dime museums at the beginning of the Enlightenment as integral to the formation of modern subjectivity.¹² The medical museums I discuss, then, form part of a larger

⁹ Benedict Anderson, Selection from *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, in *Theory of the Novel: An Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 2000).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 428.

¹¹ Lennard J. Davis, “Bodies of Difference: Politics, Disability, and Representation” in *Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities*, ed. Sharon L. Snyder, Brenda Jo Brueggemann, and Rosemarie Garland Thomson. (New York: Modern Language Association, 2002).

¹² Perhaps the most infamous American example of bodily exhibition is P.T. Barnum, who, before launching his more well-known circus, operated the American Museum in lower Manhattan from 1841

historical relationship between science, the body, and political subjectivity that was central to the foundation of both the modern nation-state and the modern individual. Like the newspaper and the novel, these museums offered only a partial, situated, and limited representation of the relation between the individual and the nation, one available primarily to middle-class male scientists. However, also like other literary and cultural forms, they participated in a larger signifying economy through which national and individual identity were mediated. As such, these displays of abject bodies within the medical museum were symptomatic of a larger emergent national discourse surrounding the body, health, and illness in the U.S during the Progressive Era.

Indeed, representations of doctors and illnesses abound in Progressive Era literature and culture. For example, Frank Norris's *McTeague* is a dentist who has been pushed out of the profession because he lacks the requisite education; Sarah Orne Jewett's *A Country Doctor* narrates the conflict between marriage and career for a small-town female physician; and Kate Chopin's Dr. Mandelet in *The Awakening* serves as a mediator between Edna and Léonce's rocky marriage, because, as he advises Léonce, his medical training makes him better equipped to handle the "peculiar and delicate organism" that is woman.¹³ Perhaps the most comical and overt statement of the relation between medicine and literature is the May 1, 1886, representation of William Dean

until it burned in 1865. Barnum quickly rebuilt it in another location, but the second incarnation was also destroyed by fire in 1868, after which Barnum moved on to the circus. Garland Thomson locates Barnum's museum on a historical continuum of bodily exhibition, with the dime museum as a sort of institutionalization of the curio cabinets of Enlightenment scholars and scientists, who displayed a range of natural wonders, including human and animal curiosities, and later manifesting in circus sideshows and fair midways. Rosemarie Garland Thomson, ed., "Introduction," in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

¹³ Jewett's *A Country Doctor* was published in 1884; Frank Norris's *McTeague* and Chopin's *The Awakening* were both originally published in 1899.

Howells holding a scalpel over a prone young woman, in a drawing titled “William Dean Howells: Demonstrator of the American Girl.”¹⁴

In the texts I consider in “Degeneration Nation,” the culture of medicine is central to how their authors negotiated larger anxieties over the imagined degeneration of national health that stemmed from the pervasiveness of eugenics during this period. The works I analyze here represent bodies in various states of what at the time was called “degeneracy”; these bodies were defined not only by illness and physical and mental disability but also by racial, gender, and class difference. This discourse of degeneracy was intimately bound up in acts of racial hysteria such as lynching in response to the liberation of black men and women from slavery; the resurgence of racial nativism in response to immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe as well as China and Japan; the popularization of eugenics not only among medical doctors and social scientists but increasingly among the general public as well; and experimentation with public health projects in the “laboratories” of the U.S. empire such as Panama, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. The changes in the political and social landscape of the nation during this period were most often negotiated on and against women’s bodies, as women are the vehicles through which the national body is reproduced. In this sense, which women reproduced, how often, and with whom were the central problematics of the discourse of degeneration. Thus, the negotiation of these questions by women writers is the primary focus of this dissertation and a central motivation for my selection of texts. In “Degeneration Nation,” then, I read literary works by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Frances

¹⁴ The drawing was originally printed in *Tid-Bits*. I am indebted to Michelle Birnbaum for reprinting it in her *Race, Work, and Desire in American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

E.W. Harper, Pauline Hopkins, Charles Chestnutt, Edith Wharton, and Edith Summers Kelley in relation to contemporary socio-cultural projects of the period, such as the Panama Pacific International Exposition (PPIE), public health initiatives in San Francisco and Panama, post-Reconstruction black uplift movements, eugenic family studies such as Charles Davenport's *The Hill Folk*, better baby and fitter family contests such as Mary Watts and Dr. Florence Sherbon's "Fitter Family for Future Firesides," and the birth control activism of Margaret Sanger.¹⁵ I also discuss medical writing by major medical figures of the period, such as S. Weir Mitchell, George M. Beard, William J. Robinson, and Miles Vandahurst Lynk. I read literature in conjunction with social and cultural texts in order to contextualize the literary works under study here as participants in complex social activities, as constituted by specific discursive practices and as outgrowths of a specific mode of production, as a means of better understanding the symbolic economies of the texts which govern their possibilities for meaning.

The texts and authors under study here all engage with this national discourse of degeneration through representations that either challenge or reinforce the cultural

¹⁵ Elizabeth Ammons' rethinking of the periodization and canonization of American literary history in her work is useful for understanding my choice of authors in this study. Ammons challenges the traditional narrative of American literary history as "coming of age" in the nineteenth century with writers such as Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, and Edgar Allan Poe; flourishing during the "American Renaissance" with Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Walt Whitman; and then receding at the turn of the century, only to peak again in the 1920s with Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and William Faulkner. Rather, she emphasizes that the proliferation of women writers at the turn of the century preceded and overlapped the professionalization of the study of American literature in the 1910s and 1920s as a discipline dominated by male academics who wanted to break from the perceived "feminization" of literature. She includes the writers I primarily discuss, namely, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Frances E.W. Harper, Pauline Hopkins, Edith Wharton, and Edith Summers Kelley, as well as other important figures I do not have the space to discuss, including Sarah Orne Jewett, Kate Chopin, Willa Cather, Zitkala Sa, Maria Cristina Mena, Mary Austin, Humishuma (Mourning Dove), Anzia Yezierska, Jessie Redmon Fauset, and Nella Larsen. See Elizabeth Ammons, *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn Into the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

authority of medical science as a tool for the improvement of the body. Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," Harper's *Iola Leroy*, Hopkins' *Of One Blood*, Chestnut's *The Marrow of Tradition*, Wharton's *Summer*, and Summers Kelley's *Weeds* all represent doctors and their interactions with patients. Gilman, Harper, Hopkins, and Chestnut represent various types of middle-class nervous disorders, such as hysteria and neurasthenia, which were thought to result from too much "brain work." I discuss these nervous disorders in the context of Mitchell's so-called west and rest cures and Beard's, classification schema of nervous illnesses. Gilman's *Herland*— which I read as a complementary text to her earlier "The Yellow Wallpaper"—presents a disease-free utopian space of perfected physical and mental health, where illness and degeneracy have been overcome through better breeding. Harper, Hopkins, and Chesnut represent black doctors as primary agents of racial uplift, who possess the medical knowledge to improve black bodies and the social and cultural authority to uplift black families. The popularity of black doctors in African American fiction coincides with the emerging black medical community, specifically Lynk and the medical journal he established, *The Medical and Surgical Observer*.

Representing ways to improve the body was also central to the PPIE. The fair hospital was a working exhibit that both showcased new medical technology and could treat sick or injured fairgoers. It was also at the 1915 fair that eugenicists first became active in the culture of national exhibitions, as fair organizers collaborated with the Race Betterment Foundation to host the week-long Second National Conference on Race Betterment, which included, among other eugenicists, Charles B. Davenport, director of the Carnegie Station for Experimental Evolution and founder of the Eugenics Records

Office (ERO). Through the ERO, Davenport trained field workers to collect data on heredity in poor rural communities, resulting in eugenic family studies such as *The Hill Folks*. He also oversaw the “Fitter Family for Future Firesides” eugenic family contests, which Watts and Sherbon started in Kansas and expanded to several other state fairs. Birth control activists such as Dr. William J. Robinson, who wrote, among many other texts, *Birth Control, or The Limitation of Offspring*, and Margaret Sanger, who was not only a prolific writer but also the founder of Planned Parenthood, the leading birth control organization in the nation, employed the medical rhetoric of population control and better breeding to garner support for the movement. I consider Wharton’s and Summers Kelley’s novels in the context of the fitter family studies and the birth control movement; both texts represent declining rural communities, locating poverty, and excessive reproduction as the primary causes of mental and physical disabilities.¹⁶

As the discourse of degeneracy persisted across disciplines and took shape within different textual forms, I take an interdisciplinary approach to this study by placing literary and cultural works in dialogue with medical, scientific, sociological, and political artifacts of the period. I endeavor to contextualize literary works as participants in complex social activities—as constituted by specific discursive practices and as outgrowths of a specific mode of production—as a means of better understanding the texts’ symbolic economies, which govern their possibilities for meaning. In my analysis

¹⁶ I consider the texts under study here to be particularly representative of the culture of biofuturity that I argue emerged during this period in response to the imagined degeneracy of both the national body and individual bodies. However, I recognize that a number of other texts might also be read in this vein. Following feminist theorists such as Joan Scott and Donna Haraway, I suggest that academic research is necessarily shaped by the scholar’s particular, situated position. Thus, the texts I choose to analyze here and the questions I ask of them necessarily derive at least in part from my particular experiences, my situated knowledge base, and my subjective response to the literature.

of these texts, I draw on feminist theory and historiography, historical-materialist approaches to literary and cultural study, as well as post-structuralist theories of discourse analysis and critical race and gender theories. I integrate rigorous historicization with archival research into literary and cultural history as well as the history of science and medicine in order to contextualize literary texts as participants in the complex social movements of the Progressive Era. My ultimate aim is to consider how this culture of biofuturity manifests differently across forms, genres, and communities, both actual and imagined.

Biofuturity and the Realist Novel

The Progressive Era authors, activists, doctors, and eugenicists I examine here respond to the specter of individual and national degeneracy by shaping a culture of “biofuturity,” that is, by imagining the future of the nation in and through either the improvement or degeneration of individual bodies. This culture of biofuturity was particularly pronounced in realist fiction in that one of the central presumptions of realism as a genre was narrative objectivity, that is, of using the medium of fiction to advance an objective truth. In the section that follows, I will draw on Foucault’s theory of biopower, as well as on recent work by scholars such as Lennard Davis, Michael Davidson, and Lee Edelman, to define biofuturity. I will then elaborate on its connection to realist fiction and explore its emergence in the context of eugenics, racial hysteria, nativism, and U.S. imperialism.

To define biofuturity, I draw on Foucault’s theory of biopolitics, which proposes a way to understand the discourse and practices employed to rationalize and systematize

the physical norming of the population through the regulation of both the individual and the social body. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault began to explore the concepts of biopower and biopolitics, which he argues developed as a result of the transition between a culture of death and blood, in which the death of the subject was dependent on the whim of the sovereign, to a culture of life, in which a system of power regulates the subject's anatomy and biology at the individual and the communal levels, respectively.¹⁷ The regulation of life, as Foucault defines it, involves, first, the mechanization of the body, "its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls"; he calls this the "anatomy-politics" of the human body.¹⁸ Second, "power" controls life through "an entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population,*" the concern of which is management of human life at the group level, that is, the control of "propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity."¹⁹

In the United States in the late nineteenth century, these two modes of discipline became manifest in part through the disciplining and professionalizing of medicine and, concurrently, the increased integration of medical practice into daily life. These practices centralized health, hygiene, and birth and emphasized the demarcation of boundaries between races, between genders, between fitness and feebleness, and so forth, particularly in relation to reproduction. The resulting cultural apparatus inscribed reproduction and women's bodies as central agents in shaping the national biofuture, as

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 139.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 139.

women literally give birth to the bodies that will comprise the future of the nation. As scholars such as Lee Edelman and Michael Davidson have suggested, then, the culture of biofuturity—representations of the future of the body—is intimately bound to the control and management of reproduction by medical doctors and, increasingly during this period, the state.²⁰

The literary genre of realism might be understood as an aesthetic form that both represents and exists in tension with this discourse of biofuturity. In *Writer and Critic*, Lukács advances a theory of aesthetics in which he argues that “the definitive quality in great realism is the passionate and dedicated search to grasp and reproduce reality as it is objectively and essentially.”²¹ Realism as a literary form, then, can be defined as a dialectical movement of social forces between the apparent and the real, with realism serving as a means to understand and describe these forces and privileging the accuracy of an objective, scientific representation, or “seeing things as they really are.” According to Amy Kaplan in *The Social Construction of American Realism*, realist writers saturate their texts with details as a way to lend substance to an unstable social world whose fluidity makes it difficult to represent.²² The “vision of the social whole” assembled within the realist novel, Kaplan argues, is not simply a strategy for containing social conflict but, rather, a way to “mediate and negotiate competing claims to social reality by making alternative realities visible.”²³ Thus, while many realist authors were interested

²⁰ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). Michael Davidson, “Pregnant Men: Modernism, Disability, and Biofuturity in Djuna Barnes,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 43 (2010).

²¹ Georg Lukacs, *Writer and Critic* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1970), p. 79.

²² Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

in describing social forces as a means of critiquing hegemonic economic and social structures, paradoxically, the adoption of a literary scientific method that laid claim to an objective view of reality also tended to reify a specific view of reality through repetition and convention. This attempt to stabilize and normalize social relations reveals the way in which realism might be understood in relation to the larger enterprise of modernity. Specifically, the scientific positivism of the Enlightenment project extinguished “any trace of its own self consciousness,” much as the panoptic objectivity of the realist author was predicated on the possibility of what Donna Haraway calls a “conquering gaze from nowhere.”²⁴

I intend with this dissertation to expand on Kaplan’s articulation of the cultural work of realism by bringing the body and its representation by realist writers into consideration. To this aim, I build on the work of Lennard Davis and Mark Seltzer to suggest that the norming of the body is central to the aesthetic goals of realism. Both Davis and Seltzer argue that in the second half of the nineteenth century, fictional representations of the body were increasingly imbricated with what Davis calls the “Utopia of the norm,” the scientific drive toward the standardization of the body. This standardization was accomplished in part by what Seltzer describes as modernity’s “insistent abstraction of persons, bodies, and motions to models, numbers, maps, charts, and diagrammatic representations,” and which he suggests becomes transfigured in the realist novel as “composite or statistical persons, the working models and living

²⁴ Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991). Also see Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

diagrams, and the unnatural Nature of naturalism.”²⁵ The changes wrought on the body through industrialization, advances in technology, the regulation of time, and the mechanization of labor are also reflected in the emphasis on the standardization of the body, a transition that Garland Thomson argues parallels a shift in the characterization of physical difference from marvelous to deviant and pathological.²⁶ Indeed, Davis argues that the narrative structures that define the normalcy of the realist novel’s central characters also engender their opposite, deviant, abnormal, and aberrant bodies defined primarily by their physical distinction from the norm.²⁷ The realist novel, then, engages in a *biopolitics* of representation, in which authors, like their contemporary doctors, biologists, sociologists, and anthropologists, do not simply describe normal and deviant bodies but rather participate in their creation.

The literary works I discuss are not all texts that would traditionally be classified as realist. In the first chapter, I discuss Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper,” which is generally classified as realist for its stark depiction of mental illness.²⁸ I also discuss her utopian novel, *Herland*, suggesting that realist and utopian fiction can be understood as parallel genres. As Thomas Peyser explains, “both [genres] aim to displace social

²⁵ Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 14.

²⁶ Rosemarie Garland Thomson argues that “as scientific explanation eclipsed religious mystery to become the authoritative cultural narrative of modernity, the exceptional body began increasingly to be represented in clinical terms as pathology, and the monstrous body moved from the freak show stage into the medical theater” (2). Rosemarie Garland Thomson, “Introduction.”

²⁷ Lennard J. Davis, “Constructing Normalcy” in *The Disability Studies Reader* (2nd ed.), ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2006).

²⁸ Howells, widely regarded as the most influential realist author during the Progressive Era, originally recommended the story for publication in the *Atlanta Monthly*, although it was eventually rejected. He eventually reprinted the story in 1920.

arrangements by revealing their self-contradictions and genealogy.”²⁹ I would add that, like realist fiction, utopian novels participate in the creation of the norm, not by juxtaposing normative and deviant characters but by eliminating deviants altogether. In the second chapter, I discuss Harper’s *Iola Leroy*, Hopkins’ *Of One Blood*, and Chestnut’s *The Marrow of Tradition*. Chestnut’s work is widely accepted for its use of dialect and journalistic descriptions. Harper’s and Hopkins’ work, however, is often read as sentimental and sensationalist, respectively; however, both employ realist strategies to counter racialized representations of African Americans and advance a more complicated image of black families and black bodies. Finally, in the third chapter, I discuss representations of physical deviance and abject characters in Wharton’s *Summer* and Summers Kelley’s *Weeds*, which both employ realist strategies of scientific distance to consider the relationship between heredity and environment. In *Constituting Americans: Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form*, Priscilla Wald argues that official stories constitute Americans through the dynamic interaction between personal and national narratives.³⁰ While the novels I discuss also participate in a project of constituting Americans, they are not “official stories.” They engage with, and often contest and rework, the dominant narrative of individual and national subjectivity through strategies of literary realism, shaping a culture of biofuturity by imaging the future of individual bodies within, through, and against the discourse of degeneracy.

²⁹ Thomas Peyser, *Utopia and Cosmopolis: Globalization in the Era of American Literary Realism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998) p. 10.

³⁰ Priscilla Wald, *Constituting Americans: Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).

Eugenics and the Culture of Biofuturity

The “utopia of the norm” that undergirds the culture of biofuturity emerged in conjunction with eugenics. Indeed, I begin my dissertation in 1883 as it is the year that Francis Galton published his work, *Inquiries Into Human Faculty and Its Development*, the text wherein he first coined the term “eugenics.” Galton first articulated his notion of eugenics in the 1869 *Hereditary Genius*, a compilation of genealogical studies of “genetically worthy” families, that is, families of wealth and high social status. In *Hereditary Genius*, Galton argues that while genius is hereditary, so are “deteriorated mental powers.” It is in a 1883 text that Galton explicitly asserts his interest in what he calls “eugenic questions,” which he defines as “questions bearing on what is termed in Greek, *eugenes*, namely, good in stock, hereditarily endowed with noble qualities.” He asserts that the term “eugenics” better connotes the “science of improving stock, which is by no means confined to questions of judicious mating, but which, especially in the case of man, takes cognisance of all influences that tend in however remote a degree to give to the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable than they otherwise would have had.”³¹ Eugenics, then, can be defined as a pseudoscience that sought to standardize the physical bodies and moral character of individuals in order to reduce deviance in the larger social body. Galton imagined this project could be accomplished primarily through control over reproduction.

Galton derived eugenics both from Spencerian notions of “survival of the fittest” and from the emerging discipline of statistics, marked by Adolphe Quetelet’s invention of

³¹ Francis Galton, *Inquiries Into Human Faculty and Its Development* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1911), p. 11.

the “average man.”³² Early American historians of eugenics such as Richard Hofstadter linked its widespread acceptance to the rise in popularity in the United States of so-called social Darwinism, which he argues laid the groundwork for the rise of eugenics.³³ However, it was actually Herbert Spencer who coined the term “survival of the fittest” twenty years before Galton published *Hereditary Genius*. Spencer’s idea of “social evolution” derived from the work of Thomas Malthus. Malthus theorized that acts of nature such as famine and disease kept the population in check and that social advances in medicine and social networks for the poor, for example, would lead to unsustainable population growth. Spencer drew on this theory to advocate for both positive and negative eugenics as a means to counter progressive social reform efforts that he perceived as enacting an “unnatural selection” that enabled the least fit to not only survive but become the most reproductively successful.³⁴ Central to his program, then, was the social control over reproduction. As he perceived middle- and upper-class women’s education as resulting in a reduction of their fertility vis-à-vis their working-class counterparts, he argued for more rigid enforcement of traditional gender norms.

In the United States during the Progressive Era, then, what concerned eugenicists was the survival of the “unfit,” those individuals who otherwise would have been “weeded out” but were being kept alive through social welfare efforts eugenicists feared would ultimately lead to racial degeneration. Eugenics captured the imagination of the

³² See Davis, “Constructing Normalcy,” and Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October* 39 (1986) for detailed discussions of Quetelet’s work in relation to physical and social norming and eugenics.

³³ Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1955).

³⁴ “Positive” eugenics is the active promotion of reproduction by wealthy and middle-class, non-disabled whites. “Negative” eugenics is the restriction of reproduction by people of color, poor people, and people with disabilities through sterilization and birth control.

nation as a means of reuniting the nation by improving the fitness of a national body still reeling from the wounds of the Civil War. While Hofstadter's work emphasizes the role of eugenics in justifying the expanding gap between the rich and the poor, I draw on more recent scholarship by Daylanne English, Shawn Michelle Smith, and Susan Schweik to complicate Hofstadter's formulation by exploring how race, gender, and disability were also central to eugenic discourse and practice in the United States during this period.³⁵ That is, eugenics conjoined with "native" white anxieties over the reproduction of racialized and gendered social and economic relations through the discourse of degeneration, which was often figured as physical and mental disability.

Disability became the overarching metaphor for discursively registering deviant subject positions, structuring what we might call, following Stuart Hall, a "biopolitical regime of representation," which drew on a range of cultural myths and stereotypes to signify physical difference.³⁶ That is, as scientific definitions of race, gender, and sexuality became commonplace by the end of the nineteenth century, non-normative subjects—people of color, immigrants, women, gays and lesbians, and the working class—came to be designated as physically or mentally degenerate or defective and as potentially harmful to the health of the larger national body. In the larger national culture after the Civil War, then, disability acts as what David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder refer to as a "narrative prosthesis," in its metaphorical use of illness to signal anxiety over

³⁵ Daylanne K. English, *Unnatural Selections: Eugenics in American Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Susan M. Schweik, *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

³⁶ Stuart Hall, "The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media," in *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text-Reader*, ed. Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003).

physical and social deviance, specifically in relation to the values constructed around social positions according to class, gender, race, and sexuality, through discourses of (individual and national) health and fitness.³⁷

And yet the cultural fascination with managing and controlling physical difference during this period was not simply metaphorical but manifested in very real, material ways. For instance, as David Yuan reveals, after the Civil War, inventors such as Oliver Wendell Holmes developed prosthetic technology with the aim of rehabilitating and reassimilating the bodies of disabled veterans by making them look and act more “normal.”³⁸ Sue Schweik’s work on the “ugly laws,” on the other hand, suggests that bodies that could not be assimilated or subjects who refused assimilation were regulated and contained by legislative acts that restricted the public presence of “ugly” people.³⁹ We might read this national preoccupation with corporeal otherness, as Garland Thomson suggests in *Extraordinary Bodies*, as “as essential to the cultural project of American self-making as the varied throng of gendered, racial, ethnic, and sexual figures of otherness that support the privileged norm.”⁴⁰ In “Degeneration Nation,” then, I aim to employ the framework of intersectionality developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw to emphasize the ways in which race, gender, class, and national identity are persistently entwined with disability within the discourse of degeneracy and the culture of

³⁷ Mitchell and Snyder define narrative prosthesis as a “perpetual discursive dependency” on disability in order to signify social and individual collapse. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, “Narrative Prosthesis and the Materiality of Metaphor,” in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2006).

³⁸ David D. Yuan, “Disfigurement and Reconstruction in Oliver Wendell Holmes’s ‘The Human Wheel, Its Spokes and Felloes,’” in *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability*, ed. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

³⁹ Schweik, *The Ugly Laws*.

⁴⁰ Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 3.

biofuturity.⁴¹ The authors I discuss all negotiate illness or disability within and between a range of intersecting and competing identity positions. For instance, in the first chapter, I read the imagined degeneracy and perfection of white women's bodies in Gilman's texts in relation both to her nativist anxieties over immigration—informed by her whiteness and her middle-class status—and to her representations of her own experience with disability. In chapter 2, I read African American writers' representations of the middle-class illness of hysteria in biracial women as a complicated challenge to the common signifying practice of representing miscegenation as disease or illness. Finally, in the third chapter, I explore the class politics that undergird the literary and cultural representations of white rural poverty both as racialized and as physically and mentally disabling.

In order to clarify my discussion of the intersecting identity categories of race, gender, class, and disability, it is useful here to take a moment to define my use of these terms. During the Progressive Era, race, gender, class, and dis/ability were defined within and through the ideological frameworks of medicine, anatomy, and biology that naturalized these identity categories. These frameworks delineated a relationship between the body and social relations in which physical difference marked distinctions in so-called character—and sometimes even species—that justified the subjugation of certain groups. In my work here, I use the terms that have now become standard vocabulary for analyzing these categories as historically and culturally contingent modes through which subjectivity is both interpellated and embodied. Specifically, my

⁴¹ Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas (New York: The New Press, 1995).

understanding of race draws from Michael Omi and Howard Winant's concept of "racialization" as a historically specific ideological process.⁴² Likewise, gender roles were defined in biological terms according to a model of sexual difference based largely on women's capacity for reproduction. The possibilities for women's participation in social life were defined ideologically in relation to their capacity to reproduce. In my use of "woman," therefore, I refer to the class of people who were demarcated and grouped together according to their anatomy and reproductive potential. Finally, I use "disability" to signify the critical study of the social and cultural production of and pejorative meaning making around illness and physical difference. In the section that follows, I elaborate on the historical context within which these biologized identities were shaped.

Gender and Reproduction

The Progressive Era was a period in which gender ideologies were shifting and destabilized both by women's activism in the first-wave feminist movement and by repressive institutional practices and paradigms that increasingly began to attribute deviance from social norms to biological pathology. Sex differences have historically been framed by science and medicine through the binary of normal-pathological, with the dominant (male) subject position classified as normal and the subaltern (female) as abnormal. Scholarship by Lisa Cartwright, Lisa Moore and Adele Clarke, and Thomas Laqueur reveals the way in which the fields of anatomy and medicine construct the male body as representative of the "normal" human body, while the female body has

⁴² Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

persistently been framed as deviant and abnormal.⁴³ Laqueur reveals how in the early nineteenth century, medical definitions of female genitalia begin to change from being conceived as identical, although interior, versions of men's to being depicted as radically different from men's. This shift to defining men's and women's genitals as radically different, Laqueur argues, mirrored the contemporary transformation in the gendered social order. Moore and Clarke's work suggests that rather than producing a stable, neutral depiction of the body, and of women's bodies in particular, anatomical representation of women's bodies change over time in relation to changes in social and cultural values and norms. Cartwright's work reveals how digital anatomical models such as the Visible Human Project perpetuate the construction of the male body as the norm while reinforcing historical representations of women's bodies as deviant and derivative from that norm. My choice of predominantly female writers, then, stems in part from my interest in examining how women's work engages with this discourse of female biological pathology. In the discussion that follows, I aim to provide a more complete historical picture of the role of medicine, particularly reproductive medicine, in shaping the "pathology" of women's bodies during this period.

Because reproduction, and hence women's bodies, were the imagined means of bringing the cultural project of biofuturity to life, I primarily analyze the way in which differently positioned female authors negotiate this discourse. Reproduction was central

⁴³ Lisa Cartwright, "A Cultural Anatomy of the Visible Human Project" in *The Visible Woman: Imaging Technologies, Gender, and Science*, ed. Paula A. Treichler, Lisa Cartwright, and Constance Penley (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Lisa Jean Moore and Adele E. Clarke, "Clitoral Conventions and Transgressions: Graphic Representations in Anatomy Textbooks, c1900-1991," *Feminist Studies* 21 (1995); Thomas Laqueur, "Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology," in *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

to black and white women's writing at the turn of the century, and this writing both challenged and reinforced the way white and black women's bodies were culturally coded as vessels for reproducing racial futures. Middle-class white women's reproduction represented the maintenance of "native" white racial purity and progress in the context of increasing anxiety over integration and immigration, and their role as "race mother" functioned as middle-class white women's primary vehicle into the national and racial public sphere. Reproduction and mothering were also understood as black women's duty to the race; domesticity was often figured as a sign of emancipation by black women reformers and writers, and reproduction and motherhood, particularly for middle-class black women, were seen as the means of both achieving racial uplift and countering racism. Working-class black and white women were often labeled "dysgenic" because of poverty and lack of education, while being denied the means to control their own reproduction. The linking of poverty and feeble-mindedness made working-class women particularly vulnerable to eugenic sterilization laws that limited reproduction.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, one in five women worked, and white middle-class women increasingly sought access to education.⁴⁴ The changing role of women in the nation came to be regarded as a cause of "race suicide" and was linked to the declining middle-class birth rate. Teddy Roosevelt, conjuring Spencerian anxieties over "unnatural selection," decreed during his sixth annual address in 1906 that the "willful sterility" of the New Woman was putting the white, U.S.-born population at risk for "race death." He condemned women of the "best stock" who refused to procreate as

⁴⁴ Laura L. Lovett, *Conceiving the Future: Pronatalism, Reproduction, and the Family in the United States, 1890-1938* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 92.

“criminal” and as “race traitors.”⁴⁵ With his speech, he lent the legitimacy of the state to the work of social scientists such as Edward Ross and Francis Walker who had initiated the rhetoric of “race suicide” with their population studies. Roosevelt also increased public scrutiny of women’s education and professionalization, and he admonished women in a 1911 lecture that the “ideal woman of the future, just like the ideal woman of the past, must be the good wife, the good mother, the mother who is able to bear, and to a rear, a number of healthy children.”⁴⁶ Roosevelt thus employed discourses of eugenics and pronatalism to advance a coercive program of positive eugenics in which white, middle-class women’s bodies and reproductive practices were increasingly subject to surveillance. Middle-class women who did not reproduce were coded as pathological, or “dysgenic.”

Advances in reproductive science at the turn of the century facilitated the enactment of eugenic theories through medical science’s increasing ability to control reproduction. The professionalization of gynecology involved the discrediting and eventual elimination of midwifery in white, middle-class communities, displacing women’s own experience and knowledge about the processes of pregnancy and childbirth.⁴⁷ The publication in 1884 of the posthumous autobiography of J. Marion Sims, the so-called Architect of the Vagina, might be read as marking the emergence of a sort of foundational myth for the discipline. Sims’s invention of a speculum marked the beginnings of the professionalization of the field of gynecology, which gradually became

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 92.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 92

⁴⁷ It is well established that the majority of midwives at the turn of the century were women and the majority of doctors were men. For an excellent analysis of this process, see Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

institutionalized within the middle class with the advent of the American Gynecological Society in 1886 and the American Association of Obstetricians and Gynecologists in 1888, both following closely the publication of Sims autobiography in 1884.⁴⁸ Agricultural scientist F.H.A. Marshall wrote the first English-language book on reproductive sciences, *Physiology of Reproduction*, published in the United Kingdom in 1910. Embryologist Frank R. Lillie's research on the freemartin, conducted in 1914, led him to the conclusion that hormones were involved in the production of sex; in 1917, zoologist George Papanicolaou developed the technique for conducting reproductive endocrinological research by scraping cells from the vaginal wall of guinea pigs; by 1929, George Washington Corner, a reproductive scientist, had mapped the hormonal action of progesterone, the primary agent in birth control pills. The expansion of reproductive medicine thus corresponded to the increasing management and professionalization of a disparate range of women's health practices that overlapped with the birth control movement, population control, and eugenics.⁴⁹

The profession of gynecology emerged as part of a larger, national middle-class project of professionalization that functioned to stabilize white male identity through the "mapping" of female difference. In this moment of social flux, the increasing social, economic, and political power of freed black men and immigrant men threatened white men's masculinity, which manifested in anxieties about the "purity" of white women's sexuality. As Dana Nelson argues, gynecology was one means through which white men

⁴⁸ For a great analysis of Sims, see Terri Kapsalis, *Public Privates: Performing Gynecology From Both Ends of the Speculum* (Duke: Duke University Press, 1997).

⁴⁹ For a very thorough analysis of this history, see Adele E. Clarke, *Disciplining Reproduction: Modernity, American Life Sciences, and "the Problem of Sex"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

displaced the anxieties and desires surrounding white national manhood onto the pathologized bodies of women (among “Others”), while consolidating their social authority.⁵⁰ Gynecology, then, was important to the stabilization of both class and national identities and interests vis-à-vis a changing social milieu as a result of emancipation and immigration.

Emancipation, Immigration, and the Culture of Biofuturity

During Reconstruction, progressive legislation was passed, such as the civil rights act of 1870 and the fourteenth amendment, which enfranchised and in effect extended citizenship rights to the approximately 4 million slaves freed as a result of the Civil War. Both of these legislative acts extended equal protection under the law to newly freed black men but excluded other racial minorities such as Chinese immigrants and Native Americans. In many ways, Reconstruction was an example of effective biracial government—fourteen African Americans held office in the House of Representatives, two served as senators, more than 600 acted as state legislators, and more than 100 held state offices. However, no significant land redistribution was accomplished, which relegated the majority of freed men and women to tenant farming, share cropping, and wage labor, predominantly for white landlords or employers. Schools remained segregated, and integration was never really accomplished in other public spheres. The expansion of political rights to include people of color challenged definitions of citizenship predicated on whiteness. This inclusion of people of color into the body

⁵⁰ Nelson, *National Manhood*.

politic was discursively rendered as an act of amalgamation that would result in national degeneration and was an impetus for the increase in white violence toward African Americans. Between 3,500 and 12,000 African Americans were murdered by whites during Reconstruction.⁵¹

Scientific racism during the Progressive Era was used to justify racial hierarchies and racial violence on the basis that some races were not as evolved and thus not capable of certain political and social rights. These scientific theories of race were deeply entrenched in Darwinian theories of evolutionary progress. Comparative anatomy was also used to support racist ideology; for instance, as Sander Gilman suggests, variation in genitalia in African women was interpreted as physical deviance and pathology.⁵² Indeed, racial differences were represented in scientific and medical discourse not only as pathological indicators of racial degeneracy but also as potentially transmittable through unregulated social—and sexual—contact between the races. As Keith Wailoo demonstrates, medical doctors and authors constructed a cultural mythology around “Negro diseases,” such as tuberculosis and syphilis, which expressed white middle-class anxieties over the changing social order.⁵³ The discursive elision of race and disease became a way to justify policies of containment, such as de jure segregation, and even of the racial violence manifest in the widespread lynching of black men. As Schweik’s work reveals, the enactment of Jim Crow laws corresponds with the implementation of

⁵¹ David W. Southern, *The Progressive Era and Race: Reaction and Reform, 1900-1917* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2005).

⁵² Sander Gilman, “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth Century Art, Medicine, and Literature,” in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁵³ Keith Wailoo, *Drawing Blood: Technology and Disease Identity in Twentieth Century America* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

the “ugly laws,” both of which functioned to segregate public spaces by removing from public intercourse those bodies and subjects perceived as a threat to national health.⁵⁴

White Anglo-Saxon anxiety over the influx of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe on the East Coast and from China and Japan on the West Coast, as well as the increased physical, social, and political mobility of African Americans, coalesced in nativism, a distinct form of nationalism that first emerged in the United States in the 1830s in response to new waves of immigration from Ireland and Germany. In *Strangers in the Land*, John Higham defines nativism as “intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (i.e., ‘un-American’) connections.”⁵⁵ Higham argues that after the Civil War, racial nativism emerged in the context of increased immigration not only from Southern and Eastern Europe but also from China and Japan. For example, between 1850 and 1880, the Chinese population in the United States increased from 7,520 to 105,465, and by 1870, composed 25% of the California labor force.⁵⁶ While Eastern and Southern European immigrants also experienced prejudice and exclusion, the backlash against Chinese immigration brought to the foreground legal questions of race and citizenship. In 1882, Congress enacted the Chinese Exclusion Act, which suspended immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years while allowing Chinese residing in the United States as of November 17, 1880, to freely travel abroad with the option of returning. Chinese immigrants continued to be subject to lynching, boycotts, and mass expulsion even after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act. By 1892, Congress

⁵⁴ Schweik, *The Ugly Laws*.

⁵⁵ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

⁵⁶ Ronald Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

passed the most repressive of the anti-Chinese legislation, the Geary Act, which required all Chinese immigrants residing in the United States to obtain a certificate from the Internal Revenue Service verifying their status. Chinese residents without certificates would be immediately deported unless they could present a white witness to confirm they had been in residence since November 17, 1880.⁵⁷

Anti-Chinese immigration policy was seeped in a discourse of the body and disease, in which immigrants were defined as inherently sick and potentially infectious. Plague and other diseases such as hookworm and yellow fever were persistently perceived to be associated with immigrants, particularly Asian immigrants, as these diseases were viewed as a side effect of the “tropicalization of the United States.” In San Francisco in particular, as Nayan Shah argues, “health authorities readily conflated the physical condition of Chinatown with the characteristics of Chinese people. They depicted Chinese immigrants as a filthy and diseased ‘race’ who incubated such incurable afflictions as smallpox, syphilis, and bubonic plague and infected white Americans.”⁵⁸ Nativist anti-Asian discrimination in the West was also strong among the white working classes, in conjunction with the increase of contract laborers from China, particularly after the signing of the Burlingame Treaty of 1868. Ronald Takaki observes that “the Chinese were located in the future. Unlike blacks and Indians, they were ‘coming’ to America.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Charles J. McClain and Laurene Wu McClain, “The Chinese Contribution to the Development of American Law” in *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943*, ed. Sucheng Chang (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

⁵⁸ Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 2.

⁵⁹ Takaki, p. 222.

Nativist anxieties over the arriving “hordes” of disease-ridden immigrants was coupled with nervousness about colonial contact. After the Civil War, empire became both a strategy by which to guarantee economic, and thus social, stability through securing markets for excess industrial and agricultural goods, as well as a proxy for unification after the failure of Reconstruction. To justify colonial domination, imperialists also employed scientific racism to designate white Anglos the superior race, claiming it was their duty to uplift the other, inferior races—a sort of melding of the white man’s burden with the civilizing mission. Anti-imperialists also employed the rhetoric of scientific racism to oppose annexation of lands in places such as the Philippines, where the inhabitants were believed to be inferior and thus unfit for self-government. As the work of Warwick Anderson reveals, U.S. empire building during the Spanish-American War provided new settings for public health projects such as the eradication of tropical diseases in the Philippines.⁶⁰ These projects relied on the rhetoric of disease, such that part of the civilizing mission was to cure the “diseased” bodies of imperial subjects.

Chapter Overview

In my first chapter, “‘The Best Kind of People’: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Biofuturity, and the Panama Pacific International Exposition,” I explore how the discourse of degeneration manifests in Gilman’s literary and sociological work. I begin my dissertation with a discussion of Gilman both because her work spans the period

⁶⁰ Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

under study here and because her engagement in progressive social reform and her imbrication in nativist, imperialist, and eugenic discourses are exemplary of the ideological contradictions of the Progressive Era. In this chapter, I read Gilman's autobiographical and fictional accounts of both her illness and treatment by S. Weir Mitchell to explore how Gilman's representation of the body is bound up in her own experience of disability. I connect this experience of illness with her anti-immigrant nativist fantasies of racial degeneration foregrounded in "The Yellow Wallpaper," which were influenced by the idea of "race suicide" popularized by Edward Ross. I argue that in many ways, "The Yellow Wallpaper" and *Herland* are complimentary texts. While the former employs racialized metaphors of Yellow Peril to critique the debilitating effects on women of both domestic ideology and the patriarchal medical profession, *Herland* imagines a frontier space of health where white women can embody traits and engage in physical pursuits that were gendered male and therefore off limits to women.

I go on to read *Herland* in relation to the 1915 exposition in San Francisco. In 1915, the same year the PPIE opened, Gilman began serializing her utopian novel, *Herland* in *The Forerunner*, the periodical she wrote, edited, and published from 1909 to 1916. Within the pages of the *The Forerunner*, Gilman's article on the fair, "The Gorgeous Exposition," is literally placed right next to a chapter of *Herland*. In "The Gorgeous Exposition," Gilman discusses her visit to the fair, which I argue influenced the utopian vision of racial betterment she advances in the novel. The PPIE was itself a utopian project, central to which was the improvement of the social body as well as individual bodies through science and medicine. Yet the PPIE also marked both the opening of the Panama Canal, completed by the United States in 1914, and the rebuilding

of San Francisco as a center of imperial power. By maintaining control over the canal, the United States regulated and contained the movement of people in the Pacific region. Gilman's novel is structured around a tension between U.S. expansionism and nativist backlash to U.S. imperialism. In *Herland*, she creates an isolated space of health for white womanhood by transplanting white bodies to those spaces inhabited precisely by racialized colonial subjects discursively constructed as dangerous to the racial purity of the nation. Thus *Herland* and the PPIE elucidate the culture of biofuturity through both their engagement in eugenic theories of racial betterment and their suggested strategies for the containment of physical difference and the improvement of the national body, which are inextricably linked to U.S. colonial projects not only in Panama but also, for instance, in Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico.

In Chapter 2, "Hysterical Reconstructions: 'Curing' Racial Ambiguity and Reimagining the Black Family," I examine the cultural work of "hysteria" in Frances E.W. Harper's *Iola Leroy*, Pauline Hopkins's *Of One Blood*, and Charles Chestnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition*. Hysteria as a nineteenth-century nervous disorder was commonly framed as a phenomenon of white, middle-class womanhood. The disease was a manifestation in individual bodies of a shift in gendered social relations as well as a marker of race and class privilege. In this chapter, I examine three novels that engage with contemporary black uplift movements to contest dominant representations of black bodies and black families as degenerate. Specifically, these novels employ the middle-class illness of hysteria as well as the figure of the black physician to craft a national semiology of the black middle class articulated in and through a eugenic vision of improving black bodies. These texts suggest that in order for both the black body and the

black self to be improved, not only must African Americans know and confront their family histories, but they also must choose black subjectivities. Only the deliberate and conscious act of black self-making, these works propose, will enable the success of racial uplift.

In Harper's and Hopkins' novels, hysteria manifests in biracial female characters as a result of their repressed racial identities. The figure of the "mulatta" was a popular literary trope of the period that depicted biracial characters as both literal embodiments of the color line and mediators between black and white social relations. In Harper's and Hopkins' novels, biracial women who think they are or pass as white experience the symptoms of hysteria in conjunction with either discovering or repressing their blackness. In Chestnut's novel, hysteria manifests in a white woman with a mixed-race sister who sees a black version of herself reflected in the "mirror image" of her sister. These instances of white-to-black transformation represent black women as akin to (and often *kin* to) white women, while making visible the repressed, racially amalgamated subjectivity that undergirds U.S. national identity during the Progressive Era.

Hysteria in biracial women, then, might be understood as an inscription onto the individual body of a larger crisis of national subjectivity, triggered by emancipation and the, albeit limited, extension of rights to freedmen and women after the Civil War. This crisis was manifest in violent public acts of racial hysteria, such as lynching, that were often justified as a means to maintain the health and morality of the population by violently removing black men and women from participation in the national body. These novels suggest that the cure for hysteria, both individual and national, is accomplished by confronting the history of sexual violence—the institutionalized rape of

black women by white men—that was at the core of slavery. It is through this confrontation that characters reconcile and reunite their own and their families' secret, repressed racial selves. Central to this “cure” is the figure of the black doctor, a representative of the so-called Talented Tenth who cures the “hysterical mulatta” by stabilizing her racial identity, enabling the reunification of the black family.

In the third chapter, “Melancholy Genealogies: Reproducing the Dysgenic Family in the Work of Edith Wharton and Edith Summers Kelley,” I explore the connections between two novels, Edith Wharton’s *Summer* and Edith Summers Kelley’s *Weeds*; the fitter family studies, many of which were conducted by Charles Davenport’s eugenic field workers; and the birth control activism of popular eugenicists such as Margaret Sanger and William J. Robinson. I examine the representation of the working poor in these literary texts, as well as in *The Hill Folk*, one of a number of studies—dubbed “melancholy genealogies” by Lothrop Stoddard—of degeneracy and criminality conducted in poor rural communities. In these studies, and in eugenic rhetoric more broadly, poverty was not only racialized but posited as a disability, specifically as a result of “feeble-mindedness.” I argue that eugenic rhetoric framed poverty as the result of an individual’s biological inability to be economically productive while simultaneously being overly *reproductive*, drawing on the population theories of Malthus and Spencer. This rhetoric augmented support for compulsory sterilization laws—upheld by the infamous *Buck v. Bell* Supreme Court ruling—as well as for a second wave of immigration restriction.

In this chapter, I also examine literary representations of unwanted pregnancies to consider the contradictory relationship between eugenics and the birth control movement.

On the one hand, the birth control movement offered a means for women to alleviate the physical, financial, and emotional strain accompanying multiple, unintended pregnancies. Yet the movement also offered a problematic promise to “improve” national health and fitness by eliminating those perceived as contributing to the degeneration of the nation. These works craft a vision of white rural communities as biologically and morally degenerate and as posing a threat to national economic and social health.

Conclusion

I hope with this project to contribute to recent studies on the Progressive Era that have situated the literature of the period at the convergence of biopolitical discourses and practices of eugenics, racial science, and medicine. Employing disability studies, critical medical studies, and theories of biopolitics, “Degeneration Nation” offers an intervention into the extensive scholarship on eugenic science’s influence on the cultural production of this period. As we are starting to understand now, the mobility and fluidity of eugenic discourse has made it particularly adaptable to our postmodern world. Transnational adoption scandals, reproductive screening technologies that “weed out” female and disabled fetuses, and the exponential growth of the exportation of white male sperm in the developing world all suggest that the intricacies of this persistent entanglement still need working out. Examining earlier manifestations of these current phenomena should shed important light on contemporary responses to the cultural symptoms of biopolitics.

**“The Best Kind of People”: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Biofuturity,
and the Panama Pacific International Exposition**

Introduction

On February 20, 1915, President Woodrow Wilson opened the Panama Pacific International Exposition (PPIE) in San Francisco, from Arlington, Virginia, by pressing an “electric button...that, by wireless telegraph operating across the continent, start[ed] the activities” of the fair.¹ This opening of the fair via telegraph, transmitted on “wireless waves which...traveled from the Atlantic to the Pacific with apparatus made in California,”² exemplified technology’s centrality to the fair; like the Panama Canal itself, these waves connected east and west, both solidifying American hegemony and yet displacing its center of authority. The fair’s promotional material even went so far as to promise that with the opening of the canal, the distinction between the east and west would be eradicated: the official fair emblem declared “Eureka! There is no east. There is no west.”³ The expo’s boosters billed it as a celebration of “a vital, living, pulsating present” rather than a commemoration of past endeavors, one that would illuminate the

¹ Frank M. Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, vol. 5 (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1921). The first transcontinental phone conversation occurred on January 25, 1915, when Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas A. Watson spoke across a 3,400-mile wire. Bell was in New York, and Watson in San Francisco, yet they repeated verbatim their first successful telephone conversation. Also present in San Francisco was Charles C. Moore, the president of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (PPIE). Moore spoke to President Woodrow Wilson in Washington, D.C., who congratulated Moore before Watson, as follows: “It appeals to the imagination to speak across the continent. It is a fine omen for the Exposition that the first thing it has done is to send its voice from sea to sea. I congratulate you on the prospects for a successful Exposition. I am confidently hoping to take part in it after the adjournment of Congress.” “Phone to Pacific From the Atlantic,” *The New York Times*, January 26, 1915, accessed October 30, 2009, <http://www.newyorktimes/learning/general/onthisday/big/0125.html#article>.

² Newspaper clipping, 141:5, Panama Pacific International Exposition Records, BANC MSS C-A 190, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

³ “Panama Canal Emblem,” 158:8, Panama Pacific International Exposition Records, BANC MSS C-A 190, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

future of the United States' expansionism beyond the frontier of the Pacific. The PPIE promised to deliver to fairgoers only what was most modern and cutting edge, thereby making technology central to the expo and underscoring its dominant, *utopian* message, which was the furthering of biological and social progress through scientific innovation.⁴ In fact, the organizers of the expo were fixated on emphasizing a vision of futurity that positioned the Pacific as the “ocean of tomorrow....that capital where the tides of life—the Orient and the Occident meet” and, more importantly, San Francisco as the locus of this encounter.⁵ The fair's promotional material emphasized the resurrection of San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake and fire, from a vice city on the edge of empire to the ultra-modern center of the U.S.'s imperial future. The rebuilding of the city after the earthquake and fire transformed San Francisco by employing some of the same strategies used to sanitize the Panama Canal Zone, techniques which in effect made it possible to complete the canal.

The same year the PPIE opened, Charlotte Perkins Gilman began serializing her utopian novel *Herland* in *The Forerunner*, the periodical she wrote, edited, and published herself from 1909 to 1916.⁶ In fact, *The Forerunner* materially connects *Herland* and the

⁴ Only cultural and scientific “products” created between 1905 and 1915 could be included. Of the new science featured at the fair, the most transformative might have been Charles Herrold's daily radio broadcasts from the Garden City Bank Building in San Jose. He “radiocast” music from six to eight hours a day to an antenna located on top of the Tower of Jewels at the fair. This was most likely the first daily radio broadcast for the entertainment of the general public. Gordon B. Greb and Mike Adams, *Charles Herrold, Inventor of Radio Broadcasting* (New York: McFarland and Co., 2003).

⁵ President's Weekly Letter to Directors, No. 14, Jan. 18, 1913, 86:10, p. 10, Panama Pacific International Exposition Records, BANC MSS C-A 190, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

⁶ For other scholarship that connects Gilman with the PPIE, see Bridgett Bennett, “Pockets of Resistance: Gender and Genre Boundaries in *Herland*” in *A Very Different Story: Studies on the Fiction of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, ed. Val Gough and Jill Rudd (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 1998); and Kristin Carter-Sanborn, “Restraining Order: The Imperialist Anti-Violence of Charlotte Perkins Gilman,” *Arizona Quarterly* 56 (2000).

PPIE, as Gilman's brief article on the fair, "The Gorgeous Exposition," is printed on the same page as a chapter of *Herland*, evidence that Gilman visited the fair herself.⁷

Gilman's utopian novel constructs a vision of a society that is infused with the contradictions of the Progressive Era. The end of the Civil War initiated a period of social, economic, and political schism in which the U.S. had become fragmented by "a cacophony of competing nations,...dissonant publics, and individual voices," represented as "agents of disorder" that threatened to undermine efforts toward national consensus.⁸ Gilman's *Herland* responds to these "dissonant publics"—immigrants, newly freed black citizens, suffragists, New Women, industrial laborers—by imagining the homogenization of the population. In *Herland*, a space populated entirely by (white) women, Gilman imagines a near perfect society, with no poverty, no disease, and no violence, which can be achieved by erasing racial, ethnic, and even sexual difference.⁹ The story of *Herland* is recounted by three white American male explorers, Van (the narrator), Jeff, and Terry, who invade the all-female nation, which is vaguely located somewhere in "the tropics," only to be taken prisoner by the inhabitants. The men are shocked to learn that the women of *Herland* reproduce parthenogenically, without the assistance of men, in effect giving birth to a "pure" race, a race undiluted by genetic mixing. By juxtaposing the narrator's commentary on contemporary U.S. society with the social utopia of *Herland*, Gilman resolves her nativist anxiety over the reproductive future of Anglo-American whites by envisioning a return to purity in response to what she viewed as the dangerous

⁷ See *The Forerunner* 6, No. 5, p. 123.

⁸ Phillip E. Wegner, *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 72.

⁹ As I will discuss later, while Gilman does not directly refer to them as white, she does link them to an "Aryan" genealogy.

proliferation of ethnic and racial others in the U.S.¹⁰

While the U.S. was engaging in expansionist empire building not only in Panama but in, for example, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, Gilman perceived the U.S. as increasingly in need of isolating itself as a way to prevent miscegenation and the subsequent “degeneration” of the Anglo race in the face of these colonial encounters. Thus, although *Herland* is an imaginative exercise in isolationism in which Gilman creates a safe, healthy space for white womanhood, she does so paradoxically by transplanting white bodies to those spaces inhabited precisely by racialized colonial subjects discursively constructed as dangerous to the racial purity of the nation. At the same time, Gilman creates a type of new origins myth that naturalizes the white colonial presence in the Americas. This tension between U.S. expansionism and nativist backlash that undergirds Gilman’s text in effect functions as what Amy Kaplan has called the “imperial unconscious” of the gendered nationalism she expounds.¹¹ Gilman’s nationalism fuses race, reproduction, and gender by asserting that women’s national duty is to reproduce “fitter” children who will improve both the race and the nation. Yet she also suggests that women, not only in their reproductive capacity but as biologically predisposed promoters of peace and prosperity, make better agents of empire. If, as Alys Eve Weinbaum argues, *Herland* is home as nation and nation as home, we might understand the imperial unconscious of the text as positing a means to expand the

¹⁰ As David R. Roediger and others have argued, whiteness is a shifting racial formation that during the early part of the twentieth century, did not include ethnic groups that might be categorized as white later in the century. White was reserved primarily for Anglo Americans; for this reason, I will use Anglo and white together. David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1999).

¹¹ Amy Kaplan, “Left Alone With America,” in *Cultures of U.S. Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

national boundaries of the U.S. by exporting white domesticity while simultaneously “walling out” colonial subjects from legal recognition as national citizens.¹²

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which both Gilman’s *Herland* and the PPIE elucidate the discursive formation of biofuturity. I use the term “biofuturity” to capture how the growing national fascination with eugenics was harnessed by both progressive and conservative rhetoric in imagining a future in which improved social relations were inextricable from the improvement of the body through science and medicine. I investigate Gilman’s text and the PPIE as a way to illuminate how these modernist projects of reform are necessarily imbricated in nativist, eugenic, and imperialist discourses and practices. That is, both Gilman’s text and the PPIE participate in what Stuart Hall calls a “racialized regime of representation,” what might be understood as a semiotic shorthand based on cultural myths and stereotypes to signify racial difference.¹³ The meaning of racial, ethnic, and sexual difference is negotiated in Gilman’s text and at the fair through the discourse of biofuturity, albeit with divergent signifying practices. In *Herland*, by inverting the colonial relationship and depicting colonial subjects as white and civilized, Gilman’s text might be read as contesting racist representations of colonial subjects and signifying instead an anti-imperialist position. However, by explicitly connecting the women of *Herland* to whiteness and racially distinguishing them from the “savages” that populate the surrounding terrain, Gilman reinforces racist depictions and erases any meaningful representations of colonial subjects. Likewise, representations of

¹² Alys Eve Weinbaum, *Wayward Reproduction: Genealogies of Race and Nation in Transatlantic Modern Thought* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

¹³ Stuart Hall, “The Whites of the Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media” in *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text-Reader*, ed. Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003).

ethnic and racial difference at the PPIE are contradictory. The official fair exhibits seem to celebrate cultural difference by showcasing arts and crafts from non-European cultures. Yet a walk down the Joy Zone reveals the underlying power dynamic that structures how cultural, racial, and ethnic differences were represented at the fair. Specifically, within the Zone, colonial subjects were transformed into commodified entertainment for the pleasure of fairgoers. And yet ironically, it is only through these representations of the Zone that we, through our archival voyeurism, are able to glimpse the realities of U.S. imperialism for racialized colonial subjects.

To explicate biofuturity in the context of Gilman's novel and the PPIE, I draw on "The Prosthetics of Empire," in which Bill Brown argues that the Panama Canal Zone acts as a sort of "prosthetic extension of American empire—not a 'natural' expression of westward expansiveness, but the mechanical institution of hemispheric domination, the technological and technocratic control over the global flow of goods" and, more importantly, I would add, of people.¹⁴ That is, the Panama Canal itself represents a sort of physical extension of the national body that gives the U.S. access to colonial spaces. While the canal enabled movement out of the U.S. and into colonial territories, it also signified the possibility of penetration of national borders by colonial subjects. By maintaining control over the canal, the U.S. could regulate a border space and contain the movement of people in the Pacific region. Similarly, *Herland*, like the Panama Canal, functions as a prosthesis of empire in that it imagines a sanitized colonial space—a secret garden of sorts—that, in effect, enables these colonial spaces for white bodies. In this

¹⁴ Bill Brown, "The Prosthetics of Empire," in *Cultures of U.S. Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 134-35.

sense, it can be read as an isolationist fantasy in reaction to increased immigration, thereby revealing the contradictions between U.S. military expansionism and white nativist anxiety. Both the PPIE and *Herland* offer a strategy for the containment of physical difference and the improvement of the national body that are inextricably linked to U.S. colonial projects not only in Panama but, for instance, in Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico.

Central to biofuturity in both *Herland* and the PPIE is not only the extension of U.S. empire, and in conjunction, the restructuring of colonial spaces both real and imagined, but also the envisioning of a eugenic body, a vision of a white American body that has overcome the “disabling” effects of so-called overcivilization. For white men, the eugenic body can be realized only through colonial contact, which offers a new space for enacting the process of masculinist Americanization that Frederick Jackson Turner famously describes in his 1893 speech, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” given precisely at the moment when the frontier has been declared closed.¹⁵ Gilman also imagines that women’s bodies can be improved on the imperial frontier; in *Herland*, the eugenic body is figured through the sexually androgynous white women (dubbed Aryan by the primary protagonist of the narrative) who have managed to implement eugenic breeding without the help of men. Gilman’s race of women are healthy and genetically fit precisely because they are free of relations with men and the negative physical effects of gender inequality. This notion of the eugenic body also pervades the PPIE through the centrality of narratives of racial improvement and

¹⁵ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1935).

evolutionary progress; one of the most popular installations, according to the fair's historian Frank M. Todd, was the Race Betterment exhibit, while the sculpture and murals throughout the fair were given names such as "Natural Selection" and "Survival of the Fittest." By placing Gilman at the PPIE, I attempt here to expand on recent Gilman scholarship that has begun to read her work not only in the context of domestic social reform movements but also as deeply entrenched in the complicated politics of nativism and imperialism of this period.¹⁶

Although Progressives such as Gilman did not exhibit the extreme racial nationalism of patrician Anglo conservatives such as Henry Cabot Lodge or Madison Grant, their calls for social reform were often tinged with a eugenic nativism. Recent scholarship on Gilman has attempted to balance previous feminist engagement with her work, which uncritically celebrated Gilman as a recovered feminist voice that had been lost to the American canon, with a consideration of what Alys Eve Weinbaum calls the "maternalist racial nationalism" or "racialized reproductive thinking" that characterizes Gilman's fictional depiction of women as "the primary agents of racial 'purity,' superiority, and nationalism."¹⁷ Much scholarship on Gilman, as Weinbaum and others have suggested, has tended to separate her political writing from her fiction, so that a critique of Gilman's nativism has only recently become central to readings of her fictional work.¹⁸ Much earlier research on Gilman tended to omit this aspect of her

¹⁶ For other scholarship on Gilman that has taken this approach, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the U.S., 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), and more recently Weinbaum, *Wayward Reproduction*.

¹⁷ Weinbaum, p. 62, p. 78.

¹⁸ Susan S. Lanser argues that "The Yellow Wallpaper" "is one of the texts through which white, American academic feminist criticism has constituted its terms," p. 415. "The canonization of the story as

writing; for instance, Ann J. Lane states in her introduction to the *Charlotte Perkins Gilman Reader* that she excluded certain works that belied Gilman's racism not to obfuscate that component of her writing, but to focus on those works most deserving of being remembered and reread.¹⁹ However, it is precisely this nativism that undergirds Gilman's fiction, beginning with one of her earliest and most widely read works, "The Yellow Wallpaper."

In this chapter, I will explore early manifestations of Gilman's vision of biofuturity, which was informed by the convergence of domestic nativism, colonial projects, and eugenic science, in order to more fully understand how this biofuturity coalesces in *Herland* and converges in the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. Thus, I begin with a discussion of the influence of eugenic ideals of biological normativity on the development of racial nativism in the U.S. at the turn of the century, particularly in relation to anti-immigration legislation. I read Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," as well as some of her sociological writing in this context, and in relation to work on race suicide by her contemporary, Edward Ross. I then discuss the imagined

representative of a "universal women's text" is symptomatic of white feminist theorists' reluctance to critically address their own investment in reading a "privileged, white, New England woman's text as simply—a woman's text," p. 424; that is, that this attempt "to constitute an essential female subject by shunting aside textual meanings that expose feminism's own precarious and conflicted identity" undergirds the repetitive reading of the story, rendering its hermeneutical trajectory incomplete. Susan Lanser, "Feminist Criticism, 'The Yellow Wallpaper,' and the Politics of Color in America," *Feminist Studies* 15 (1989). Carol Stabile argues that the recuperation of Gilman by feminist scholars participates in the construction of a "selective tradition" that imagines Gilman's *Herland* as a genealogical forerunner to feminist science fiction of the 1970s. This, she contends, glosses over significant differences, and has made it difficult for feminist academics to confront "a history of racism, elitism, and homophobia in which women—some of whom called themselves feminists—participated, in addition to confronting the racism, classism, and homophobia that exist in the present" (35). Stabile, *Feminism and the Technological Fix* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 1994.

¹⁹ Ann J. Lane, "The Fictional World of Charlotte Perkins Gilman" in *The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Reader*, ed. Jill Rudd and Val Gough (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999); Weinbaum's excellent chapter on Gilman pointed me to this example.

physical degeneracy of white, middle-class bodies and popular “cures,” such as S. Weir Mitchell’s rest and west cures, the latter of which was often registered culturally via the colonial encounter. I argue that through *Herland*, Gilman imagines a sort of west cure in which the bodies of white women are saved from degeneration through contact with the imperial frontier. I discuss U.S. imperial projects in Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Panama. Finally, I link Gilman’s imperial vision of racial betterment with the PPIE and its expansionist, eugenic vision of national progress.

Eugenics, Nativism, and the National Body

By the mid-nineteenth century, social scientists and physicians began to construct what Lennard Davis calls the “Utopia of the norm,” in which the average became both an ideal and an imperative. In the U.S. in the late nineteenth century, the norm was intricately bound up with scientific definitions of race, gender, and sexuality and defined according to the hegemonic liberal subject position—white, male, heterosexual, middle class. The norm is a fictional tool of domination, one that, as Davis argues, cannot exist without the parallel concept of the deviant, wherein bodies and behaviors not within the parameters of normalcy were (and still are) registered as abnormal and thus aberrant.²⁰ Although normative physical and mental ability were but one component of this dominant vision of the human body, disability became the overarching metaphor for discursively registering deviant subject positions. That is, as scientific definitions of race, gender, and sexuality became commonplace by the end of the nineteenth century,

²⁰ Lennard J. Davis, “Constructing Normalcy” in *The Disability Studies Reader* (2nd ed.), ed. Lennard Davis (New York: Routledge, 2006).

non-normative subjects—people of color, immigrants, women, gays and lesbians, and the working class—came to be designated as degenerate or defective and as potentially harmful to health of the larger national body. In the U.S., beginning with emancipation, the reconfiguring of the national body to include former slaves and eventually immigrants, women, and colonial subjects posed a threat to native-born white male hegemony. Sociologists such as Francis Walker and Edward Ross popularized the idea that “race suicide” (which I discuss at greater length below) was jeopardizing the future of white bodies, as a result of the decline in white birth rates and the potential for comingling and thus racial amalgamation with new immigrants and African Americans. Eugenic policies offered a solution to this so-called race suicide by assimilating or eliminating deviant individuals through sterilization laws, immigration restriction, and Jim Crow segregation, for example. As deviance was understood as hereditary, limiting reproduction by non-normative individuals as well as the social and sexual intercourse between normative and deviant individuals became the primary means of enacting this project of biological improvement. Biofuturity, then, might be understood as emerging from the confluence of nativism, eugenics, and U.S. expansionism, and manifesting in anxieties over the deterioration of a cohesive national culture and the imagined degeneration of white bodies. In this chapter, I am particularly interested in how both the degeneration and the improvement of the white body were culturally represented in relation to Asian immigration on the Pacific Coast.

Native-born white anxiety over the influx of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe on the east coast, and China and Japan on the west coast, as well the

increased physical, social, and political mobility of African Americans coalesced in nativism, a distinct form of nationalism that first emerged in the U.S. in the 1830s in response to new waves of immigration from Ireland and Germany. In *Strangers in the Land*, John Higham defines U.S. nativism as “intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (i.e., ‘un-American’) connections.”²¹ Higham argues that there have been three main currents of nativism in the U.S., dating to before the Civil War: anti-Catholicism, fear of foreign radicals, and racial nativism. Whereas the former two strains functioned to define what the nation was not, the latter served as a means of asserting an American national identity rooted to an Anglo-Saxon ethnic identity.

During the period during and after the Civil War, the extreme nativism of the preceding decades diminished through the uniting of European immigrants and U.S.-born soldiers against a common, albeit regional and internal, enemy and by accelerating economic expansion that increased demand for immigrant labor. During Reconstruction, progressive legislation was passed, such as the civil rights act of 1870 and the fourteenth amendment, which extended citizenship rights to emancipated black men. Both of these legislative acts extended equal protection under the law to newly freed black men, as well as to other racial minorities such as Chinese immigrants. The severe economic depression from 1873 to 1877 decelerated Eastern and Southern European immigration but did not lead to a violent exclusion movement as occurred with Chinese immigration. In response to Sinophobic backlash against Chinese immigration, by 1880 the U.S. began to impose restrictions on Chinese immigrants. Nativist anti-Asian discrimination in the

²¹ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994). I am drawing on Higham’s foundational work on nativism in the following synopsis.

West among the white working class, in conjunction with the increase of contract laborers from China, particularly after the Burlingame Treaty of 1868, garnered national support. In 1882, Congress enacted the Chinese Exclusion Act, which suspended immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years while allowing Chinese residents in the U.S. as of November 17, 1880, to travel freely abroad with the option of returning. In 1884, Congress amended the act to mandate that Chinese residents show a certificate upon reentering the U.S.; in 1888, Congress again amended the act, this time to prohibit all Chinese laborers from reentering the U.S., regardless how long they had been in residence or whether they had a certificate. The most repressive of the anti-Chinese legislation was the Geary Act of 1892, which required that all Chinese immigrants residing in the U.S. obtain a certificate from the Internal Revenue Service verifying their status. Chinese residents without certificates would be immediately deported unless they could present a white witness to confirm they had been in residence since November 17, 1880. The Geary Act also stipulated that any Chinese person being deported must first serve 60 days of hard labor (this provision was eventually overturned by the Supreme Court in *Wong Wing v. United States*).²²

Chinese immigrants were subject to lynching, boycotts, and mass expulsion even after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act. The series of depressions in the 1870s and 1880s exaggerated the gap between rich and poor, chronicled by reformist works such as Josiah Strong's 1885 *Our Country* and Jacob Riis's 1890 *How the Other Half Lives*. The growing urban working classes, composed increasingly of new immigrants,

²² Charles J. McClain and Laurene Wu McClain, "The Chinese Contribution to the Development of American Law," in *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943*, ed. Sucheng Chang (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

were treated with suspicion not only because many were Catholic but also because as Europeans they were considered more receptive to radical social movements and political ideologies. These class divisions inspired a resurgence of nativism, as native-born white Americans increasingly cultivated what Higham calls an “ethnocentric repugnance” to the new European immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, whom they perceived as “educationally deficient, socially backward, and bizarre in appearance.”²³ This “repugnance” relied on the visibility of ethnic and racial difference, which was coded as “deficient” and “bizarre,” in other words, as degenerate. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 set a precedent for federal restriction of immigration that was extended to new immigrants on the basis that “hereditary European pauperism was incurable”; as a result, “convicts, lunatics, idiots, and persons likely to become public charges were denied admission.”²⁴ Later proposed restrictions included literacy tests and physical inspections by overseas American consuls; even the *Nation* advocated limiting immigration to English speakers.²⁵ In this sense, immigration restriction took on a decidedly biopolitical quality, as immigrant bodies were cast as dangerously antithetical to liberal individualism by posing the threat of infection and disease to the national body. Their perceived intellectual and cultural deficiencies as well as their social and economic dependency were figured as “incurable” and, if mixed with the “normative” white population, potentially debilitating for the nation. The resurgence of nativism was solidified by the late 1880s, a period of widespread labor strikes and boycotts which culminated in the Haymarket bombing in 1886. This incident unleashed a flood of

²³ Ibid., p. 65.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 44.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 44.

nationalist hysteria, which drew on fears of foreign radicals, Catholicism, and racial difference that intensified in the 1890s. Immigration restriction in the 1890s gave complete oversight of immigration to the federal government and required that steamship companies return all immigrants denied admission to the U.S. to their home countries, which informally made European ticket agents “America’s most effective immigration inspectors.” This new legislation also denied admission to people with “loathsome or contagious disease,” thereby directly linking the immigrant body with disease and disability.²⁶

One factor in the rise of racial nativism during this period is the popularizing of eugenics. At this moment in the late nineteenth century, Northern European, or Anglo-Saxon, identity also underwent a transformation, from what Higham calls a “politico-literary concept of race [that] lacked a clearly defined physiological basis,” to a race-based identity that relied on Darwinian theories of evolution, Mendel’s rediscovered work on heredity, and racial classification schemas developed by natural scientists to reframe national identity in biological terms. This application of current scientific models of race to national and ethnic identities assigned these different identities biological qualities that were ranked according to a racial hierarchy, with native-born Anglo-Saxons at the top.²⁷ These racialized hierarchies of ethnic identity took on different forms in different regions of the U.S. As Higham argues,

The pattern of white supremacy crystallized long before the birth of American nationalism. . . . The exaltation of white supremacy in the antebellum South had actually served to weaken national loyalty; and

²⁶ Ibid., p. 99-100.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 133. One example of the extent to which this racial thinking permeated understanding of social and cultural differences is that political radicalism was deemed a “blood disease.”

California's anti-Chinese hysteria had presented itself largely as a defense of "white civilization," not as an explicitly nationalist movement. At the turn of the century, however, the Anglo-Saxon idea of American nationality was so widely popularized that the racial egoisms of South and West could easily permeate a nationalism ideologically adapted to receive them.²⁸

Thus notions of native-born white racial supremacy developed differently in the western, southern, and eastern regions of the U.S., as an effect of native-born whites' interaction with Asian immigrants, African Americans, and Eastern and Southern European immigrants. However, by the turn of the century, this sense of native-born white identity as biologically different from and superior to ethnic and racial others came to define U.S. national identity. In this chapter, I am particularly interested in how the rhetoric of racial nationalism was employed by authors such as Gilman to negotiate the emerging cultural and economic influence of the West as a result of the construction of the Panama Canal and the rebuilding of San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake and in relation to Asian immigration to the Pacific coast.

Eugenics, as a popular psuedo-science, not only contributed to the reconceptualization of nativism in racial terms but also dominated much political and social thought at the turn of the twentieth century. Eugenics—"the science of human heredity and the art of human breeding"²⁹—is generally thought to have originated with the work of Francis Galton, a "pass-degree Cambridge graduate who was neither a formal mathematician nor an intellectually disciplined scientist."³⁰ Galton set out to prove that "the race" (white, Anglo) could be improved by getting rid of undesirable traits and

²⁸ Ibid., p. 170.

²⁹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1991), p. 32.

³⁰ Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of the Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 17.

increasing desirable traits, ostensibly through ensuring marriages between men and women with a preponderance of what he called “natural ability.” Galton’s most influential work, *Natural Inheritance*, published in 1889, combined his research in heredity with the application of the theory of mathematical probability to statistics. However, the results of his study of heredity ultimately contradicted his eugenics paradigm: if the extreme ends of the population were allowed to reproduce without intervention, their progeny regressed to the mean. That is, rather than replicating their deviant characteristics, these “extremes” would exhibit “normal” or “average” traits.³¹

Galton’s questionable results did not prevent eugenics from gaining popularity in the U.S., and this popularity was in fact related to escalating anxiety among “native” (and nativist) whites over an increase in immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe as well as from Asia.³² Eugenics gave scientific credence to racist discourse that assigned biosocial significance to visible physical differences; this biosocial meaning making differentiated new immigrants as nonwhite Others who were perceived as infusing American culture with their inferior genetic material and their deficient standard of living. Social scientists such as Francis A. Walker attributed social inequalities to biology; for example, Walker, a sociologist, fused heredity and poverty with his publication of the first statistical documentation of “race suicide” in 1891.³³ Walker claimed his data indicated that the new immigrants were responsible for the shrinking of

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ronald Takaki cites an increase in the Chinese population in the U.S. from 1,520 to 105,465 between 1850 and 1880, with the Chinese constituting “8.6 percent of the total population of California and an impressive 25 percent of the wage-earning force,” p. 216. *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

³³ Francis A. Walker, “Immigration and Degradation,” *Forum* (August 1891): 634 (APS Online, 1886-1930).

the birth rate among the so-called native population. He argued that U.S.-born white Anglos were having fewer children because of intense economic competition for low-wage, labor-intensive jobs fed by immigration, competition the U.S-born population was reluctant to pass on to its children.

Edward A. Ross coined the term “race suicide” in his 1901 annual address to the American Academy of Political and Social Science. Ross’s work, like that of many Progressive-era intellectuals, is indicative of the ideological contradictions of the period. Ross, himself an orphan who was raised on a family farm in Iowa, was backed by the supporters of Eugene V. Debs in the 1894 Pullman Strike, yet six years later, he argued for the restriction of Japanese immigration at a labor forum in San Francisco. Like Walker, Ross attributes the causes of race suicide to lower standards of living among immigrants, which he suggests enabled them to reproduce more children in relation to U.S.-born whites. He uses as an example the influx of what he calls “Asiatics,” presumably a conflation of Chinese and Japanese immigrants. In his address, Ross describes Chinese immigrants as “a capable race that multiplies on a lower plane.”³⁴ He argues that when faced with immigrants who are intellectually and economically competitive with Anglos, like the Chinese, Anglos face the prospect of “race suicide” because the Chinese standards of living are lower. Ross’s central argument is as follows:

[t]he working classes gradually delay marriage and restrict the size of the family, as the opportunities hitherto reserved for their children are eagerly snapped up by the numerous progeny of the foreigner. The prudent, self-respecting natives first cease to expand, and then, as the struggle for existence grows sterner and the outlook for their children darker, they fail

³⁴ Edward A. Ross, “The Causes of Race Superiority” (Annual Address), *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 18-23 (1901): 87.

even to recruit their own numbers.³⁵

According to Ross, then, a willingness on the part of Chinese immigrants to reproduce more often with less resources is the central cause of the declining birth rate of the native whites, who reproduce less in order to maintain their higher standard of living.

However, the specter of proliferating “Asiatic” immigrants is inconsistent with immigration legislation of the period. Ross gave his 1901 address almost 20 years after the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 (which prohibited Chinese laborers from returning to the U.S. after return visits to China), and a year prior to the act’s scheduled expiration in 1902, at a time when Japanese immigration was beginning to surpass that of Chinese.³⁶ Furthermore, under both the Page Act of 1875 and the Chinese Exclusion Act, the only Chinese women who could legally enter the U.S. were merchants’ wives; the wives of laborers were excluded. In 1875, only 4% of the Chinese population in the U.S. was female, which amounted to about one Chinese woman for every 21 Chinese men. By 1880, the number of Chinese men in the U.S. exceeded 75,000, whereas there were fewer than 4,000 Chinese women. Many Chinese women opted not to emigrate upon hearing of the kidnapping and forced prostitution of Chinese women in the U.S. After the Page Act, Chinese women who decided to risk emigration were often denied visas by U.S. consuls in China or were detained for long periods by immigration officials once they arrived in the U.S. Ironically, legal restrictions such as the Page Act on immigration by Chinese women might actually have contributed to

³⁵ Ibid, p. 88.

³⁶ According to Laura Lovett, “by 1902, there would be 72,257 Japanese, compared with 71,531 Chinese,” p. 83. Laura Lovett, *Conceiving the Future: Pronatalism, Reproduction, and the Family in the United States, 1890-1938* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

lowering wages and limiting economic opportunities for white male heads of household, although not because of the hyperfertility of the “Asiatic” family, as Ross suggests. Rather, without wives and children and with miscegenation laws prohibiting their marrying white women, Chinese laborers could work for less money than what white men required to sustain a family.³⁷

Yet while legal immigration of Chinese women was restricted, the west coast was a center for sex trafficking. Chinese girls and women were often smuggled into the U.S. as freight and forced to work as prostitutes. In her work *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans*, Jean Pfaelzer suggests that while the smuggling of Chinese women into the U.S. responded to the demands of Chinese miners and vegetable growers for prostitutes, Chinese women were “both desired and despised by whites [and] thought to carry with them the power to taint the physical and moral purity of the nation.”³⁸ Many of the prostitutes were “go-away girls,” female babies abandoned or sold.³⁹ Pfaelzer reveals that even after the 1882 Exclusion Act, the *mui tsai* or “little sister” system continued; in this system, “impoverished parents sold a young daughter into domestic service, usually stipulating that she be freed through a marriage when she turned eighteen. During her time as a bond servant, she earned no wages, was not free to leave her ‘employer,’ was usually overworked, often suffered physical abuse from her mistress,

³⁷ Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans* (New York: Random House, 2007). According to Pfaelzer, between 1861 and 1913, California, Arizona, Idaho, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming enacted laws that “criminalized or voided” any marriages between whites and people of color. The federal government passed a less overt but more coercive restriction in 1907, which mandated any woman who marries a “foreigner” to take his citizenship.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 94, p. 97.

³⁹ Ibid.

and was sexually available to her master or his son.”⁴⁰ Women and girls who were sold into the slave trade were paid up front but then forced to relinquish the money to their masters and sign contracts stipulating the number of years they would be held as prostitutes. Any day they were unable to work added two weeks to the initial term.⁴¹

In the popular imagination of the American west, Chinese women signified both moral depravity, in contrast to white women’s virtue, and the threat of national disease. American doctors encouraged the notion that Chinese women were “racially predisposed” to sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis and did not discourage the belief that such disease could be transmitted to white families nonsexually by, for example, Chinese housekeepers. In this sense, the Chinese body, and bodies of Chinese women in particular, came to signify the threat of contamination of white families.⁴² Feminists such as Gilman viewed Chinese women as existing in a degraded, even degenerate state, either as diseased prostitutes or as merchants’ wives infantilized and disabled by the practice of foot binding. At about 4 years of age, Chinese women of the merchant class had their feet tightly wrapped in cloth strips and their toes were then forced backward to the heel until the bones slowly broke. The practice of foot binding inscribed middle-class gender ideology onto women’s bodies, an ideology that greatly resembled gender codes for middle-class American women; it emphasized women’s chastity and confined them to “an invalid’s seclusion” where their only primary human contact was with servants.⁴³ Yet in *Women and Economics*, Gilman herself defines white,

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 94.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

middle-class marriages as the equivalent of prostitution, and her fictional story “The Yellow Wallpaper” is an account of the psychologically debilitating affects of domestic isolation on women. National anxieties over changing family structures due in part to economic depressions during this period were projected onto the bodies of Chinese immigrants, in particular those of Chinese women, who might also have represented to white feminists such as Gilman an uncanny doppelganger to their own debased social position.

Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” can be read within the context of these contradictions between the realities of Asian immigration to the U.S. and the hyperbolic “Yellow Peril” that surrounded the process; in fact, it was published the same year the excessive Geary Act was implemented.⁴⁴ Susan Lanser offers perhaps one of the most unique readings of “The Yellow Wallpaper” in which she critiques not only Gilman’s investment in racial discourses around the construction of “yellow” as a code for a racialized other but also an interpretive model that has accepted at face value what is written on the wall, as it were, and that ignores the conflicts and contradictions within feminism. Gilman, Lanser argues, associates patriarchal oppression of women with the lower biological status she attributes to non-Anglo “yellow” peoples, while suggesting “native” Anglos have the capacity not only to change but to actively contribute to feminist reform. The wallpaper then, according to Lanser’s reading, acts as the political unconscious of Gilman’s historical moment, “in which an Aryan woman’s madness, desire, and anger, repressed by the imperatives of ‘reason,’ ‘duty,’ and ‘proper self-

⁴⁴ Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” was originally rejected by the *Atlantic Monthly* but eventually appeared in the *New England Magazine* in 1892.

control,' are projected onto the 'yellow' woman, who is, however, also the feared alien."⁴⁵ I would expand on Lanser's reading by arguing that the yellow woman is not merely an alien Other but a potential self; to the narrator confined in the attic nursery, the wallpaper becomes bars, behind which she sees a woman. She projects herself into the yellow wallpaper, and what emerges at the end of the story is the embodiment of Gilman's own anxieties over racial degeneracy. The narrator is reduced to creeping on all fours, to a degenerate, almost primate state of humanity, the imagined outcome of both gender and racial miscegenation.⁴⁶

Thus while "The Yellow Wallpaper" is certainly a feminist critique of the debilitating effects on women of the pathologizing of the female body, it is also an allegory of Gilman's theory of racial degeneracy. In *Women and Economics*, she argues that segregation of the sexes acted as an instrument of "devolution" and that keeping women segregated led to "moral miscegenation" because it reduced women to "savages."⁴⁷ Gilman argues, then, that women—specifically middle-class white women, whom she views as potential race leaders—and men are not of the same species and that women have been reduced to a more primitive or savage state as a result of their exclusion from public life, their economic dependence on men, and their hypersexualization. Because Gilman subscribed to a Lamarckian view of evolution, she believed that the degenerative effects of these constraints would be most visible in the dysgenic offspring of this "miscegenous" relation. The (yellow) woman in the wallpaper

⁴⁵ Lanser, "Feminist Criticism, 'The Yellow Wallpaper,' and the Politics of Color in America," p. 429.

⁴⁶ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper," in *Herland and Selected Stories*, ed. Barbara H. Solomon (New York: Signet, 1992).

⁴⁷ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

then might be read as the specter of the degenerate future promised as a result of this arresting of women's potential. Linking the white middle-class narrator with the "yellow" woman brings into relief Gilman's anxieties that the genetic "progress" of white women was at risk, and that if social reforms were not made to improve women's position, white women would "devolve" and their social position would become indistinguishable from women of other races.

Gilman's anxiety over the degenerative effects of racial mixing influenced her vision of social reform. In her journal *The Forerunner*, she argues against unrestricted immigration, and in fact distinguishes between immigration and what she called "importation." Immigration, she argues, was beneficial to the nation because it brought "wise," "strong," "brave," and "thrifty" individuals into the nation. Importation, however, brought "low-grade laborers...to work in our mills and mines at lower rates than our own men would take."⁴⁸ She likens these latter groups to swarms of "social refuse," "a stream of uncongenital material that makes assimilation impossible, [and] is an unending source of civic disease."⁴⁹ She is particularly weary of what she calls the "transient labor" of Chinese and Italian immigrants, who "come here in enormous numbers, profit by all our advantages, and yet remain aliens and with allegiances still paid to the land they left."⁵⁰ The transient laborers, she writes, are "almost exclusively masculine. It is not good for men to be alone—and it is not good for the country they are alone in."⁵¹ Not coincidentally, her diatribes emerge as the Panama Canal is being

⁴⁸ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Let Sleeping Forefathers Lie," *The Forerunner* 6 (1915), p. 261.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁵¹ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Immigration, Importation, and Our Fathers." *The Forerunner* 5 (1914), p.

completed. Indeed, Gilman's racial panic over the influx of immigrants can be read as responding to the completion of the canal and its potential for transporting "inassimilable" laborers to the western shores of the U.S.

Sui Sin Far's short story, "In the Land of the Free," offers a stark contrast to Gilman's vision of immigration. In the short story, which was originally published in the New York magazine *Independent* in 1909, Sui Sin Far narrates the return of Lae Choo, a Chinese immigrant, to the U.S. with her two-year-old son, who was born while she was in China. Although Lae Choo and her merchant husband are "documented," her son is not, and he is immediately confiscated by U.S. Customs authorities. This opening scene on the San Francisco wharf provides a revealing representation of the social dynamics of Pacific port cities. Lae Choo's arrival is delayed because the busy port—which included "transports from the Philippines," alluding to U.S. colonial ventures—made it difficult for the ship to dock. After an hour, the ship finally anchors, yet Lae Choo's husband, Hom Hing, is delayed another hour before "he could board the steamer and welcome his wife and child."⁵² The customs officials again detain the couple and eventually take the child into custody because he "has no certificate entitling him admission to this country."⁵³ This scene suggests that counter to Gilman and others' nativist panic over immigration, the U.S. maintained rigid control over its borders and strictly managed the movement of people in the Pacific region. Unfortunately, the story also suggests that the U.S. government is more effective at detaining immigrants than ensuring their legal

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⁵² Sui Sin Far, "In the Land of the Free," in *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, vol. C (5th ed.), ed. Paul Lauter (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), p. 786-87.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 787.

protection. Ten months later, Lae Choo visits the mission nursery where her son had been held. He is returned to her, yet his assimilation is immediately apparent: he is “dressed in blue cotton overalls and white-soled shoes.” When Lae Choo “fell on her knees and stretched her hungry arms toward her son,” her child “shrunk from her and tried to hide himself in the folds of the white woman’s skirt. ‘Go ’way, go ’way!’ he bade his mother.”⁵⁴

This image of forced assimilation is echoed in the reform proposed by Gilman in “Immigration, Importation, and Our Fathers.” As a sort of expansion of immigrant detention centers like Angel Island, Gilman advocates for a “National Training School of Citizenship,” which would literally be a “model America”; that is, it would be composed of “model farms, model factories, model schools,” and would essentially function to model hegemonic American culture. As Gilman envisions, “Old and young, men and women, should here be trained, mentally, morally, and physically, as to health, as to clothing, as to the moral standards and manners of the country.”⁵⁵ Perhaps more important for Gilman, immigration should be limited “such as to keep the foreign population a little less than the native born. Americans of native born parentage should have a majority vote in their own country.”⁵⁶ She singles out China as an example of a nation with an unsustainable population:

[China] wants to overflow into more thinly settled lands, and fill them up too....The ultimate result would be the occupation of the earth by those races having the largest birthrate; namely, the Oriental and African. This world wants more than mere numbers of people. The demands of social evolution are for higher forms of social evolution—not merely swarming

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 792.

⁵⁵ Gilman, “Immigration, Importation, and Our Fathers,” p. 119.

⁵⁶ Gilman, “Let Sleeping Forefathers Lie,” p. 263.

millions...let us...protect ourselves from such a steady stream of non-assimilable stuff as shall dilute and drown out the current of our life, and leave this country to be occupied by groups of different stock and traditions, drawing apart, preserving their own nationality, and making of our great land merely another Europe.⁵⁷

Gilman here explicitly connects colonial competition for “more thinly settled lands” with eugenics and nativism; she imagines a biofuture in which “swarming” masses of less advanced forms of humanity undermine not only U.S. efforts to augment its colonial spaces but also to maintain national cohesion. In this vision, the presence within the U.S. borders of Chinese and African immigrants that cannot perforce be assimilated runs the risk of polluting not only the social body of the nation but the physical bodies of its citizens.

In Sickness and in Health: Imagining National Biofutures

Permeating nationalist rhetoric during this period were metaphors of illness and health in which native-born Anglos were cast as susceptible both to race suicide and to the ailments of “advanced civilization.” Texts during this period, such as Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper,” reveal that this historical moment is distinguished by the amalgamating of literary and medical discourses, so that these discourses structure and enforce a coercive model of normativity.⁵⁸ The rhetoric of biofuturity pervades Gilman’s vision of progressive social reform, which she puts forth in both her fiction and nonfiction writing. Her social critique is infused with her own bodily experiences of illness and health, specifically her experience of postpartum depression, which she

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ I am borrowing here from Jane F. Thraikill, who argues that this moment is “marked by the incursion of the literary *into* the medical,” p. 528. Jane F. Thraikill, “Doctoring the Yellow Wallpaper,” *ELH* 69 (2002).

recounts in her autobiography and fictionalizes in the short story, “The Yellow Wallpaper.” This experience contours not only the language of Gilman’s vision of social reform but the types of reform she imagined for both the national body and individual bodies. As Janet Beer argues, “The majority of her work is concerned with exegeticizing the body politic—the most ancient of metaphors—as a sick body, a body which will always be ailing in some or all of its parts while women are disabled or even diseased by their relegation to the living of partial lives, that is the lives of married women.”⁵⁹ The metaphors of illness and health that structure much of Gilman’s writing reveal her conviction that a causal relationship exists between how a society is organized and the individual health of its populace; these metaphors place the individual body in a fraught relation with the nation, in which an improved national future becomes contingent on the bodies of its subjects and, specifically, women, who are the reproducers of citizens.

Gilman’s own vision of national health is particularly focused on reproduction and mothering; moreover, she attributes her own life-long illness to her experience of motherhood and marriage. The connection between physical and mental illness and alienation from motherhood and domestic life had been explored by many authors, including Kate Chopin in *The Awakening*, Edith Summers Kelley in *Weeds* (which I discuss in Chapter 3 of this dissertation), Dorothy Canfield in *The Homemaker*, and Nella Larsen in *Quicksand*. In her autobiography, Gilman recounts her initial breakdown as a bout of “nervous prostration,” which she describes as “a growing melancholia, . . . [that]

⁵⁹ Janet Beer, “Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Women’s Health: The Long Limitation,” in *A Very Different Story: Studies on the Fiction of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, ed. Val Gough and Jill Rudd (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 1998), p. 54. Beer further argues that “its enduring legacy is not only in the recurrence of her ill-health but in the images and structures of disability and disease with which she subsequently spent her writing life,” p. 57.

consists of every painful mental sensation, shame, fear, remorse, a blind oppressive confusion, utter weakness, a steady brain-ache that fills the conscious mind with crowding images of distress.”⁶⁰ Nervous disorders such as nervous prostration and hysteria were grouped under a larger category of illness dubbed “neurasthenia” by physicians such as S. Weir Mitchell and George Beard. These illnesses were the so-called diseases of “over-civilization” that were associated with the mental strain of middle-class life. Gilman analyzes her experience of “nervous prostration” (what might today be called postpartum depression) and her various attempts to remedy it in the chapter of her autobiography titled “The Breakdown.” In this chapter, Gilman suggests that her enduring illness stemmed from her “mismatch” to Walter Stetson, linking her symptoms to her incompatibility with motherhood and domestic life. Gilman writes that rather than experiencing “love and happiness” while holding her child, she felt “only pain.” Her “feebleness,” she asserts, began during her courtship with Stetson, only to grow “rapidly worse after marriage.” Reflecting on her experience, Gilman frames her mental illness in corporeal terms:

Absolute incapacity. Absolute misery. To the spirit it was as if one were an armless, legless, eyeless, voiceless cripple. Prominent among the tumbling suggestions of a suffering brain was the thought, “You did it yourself! You did it yourself! You had health and strength and hope and glorious work before you—and you threw it all away. You were called to serve humanity, and you cannot serve yourself. No good as a wife, no good as a mother, no good at anything. And you did it to yourself!”⁶¹

This passage is significant for two reasons. First, it reveals the contradictions between the demands of a middle-class gender ideology predicated on female domesticity and the

⁶⁰ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography*, Ann J. Lane, introduction (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), p. 90.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

actual, particular experiences of women. Second, Gilman's description of herself as a mutilated body cut off from physical sensation is crucial to understanding how mental illness was conceived in this particular historical moment.

First, then, Gilman's insistence that she caused her own illness—did it to herself—frames her marriage and motherhood as a bad *individual* choice that had decidedly *individual* physical consequences. In this way, then, she does not account for emergent gender identities, generally figured as the New Woman. In the first decade of the twentieth century, for instance, one in five women worked, and white middle-class women began to seek access to education in increasing numbers.⁶² The turn of the century, then, marked a moment of crisis in the dominant middle-class ideology of female domesticity. Yet at the same time, the changing role of women in the nation came to be regarded as a direct cause of race suicide and was linked to the declining middle-class birth rate. As Teddy Roosevelt decreed during his sixth annual address in 1906, the “willful sterility” of the New Woman put the white U.S.-born population at risk for “race death”; he condemned women of the “best stock” who refused to procreate as “criminal” and as “race traitors.”⁶³ Roosevelt admonished women in a 1911 lecture that the “ideal woman of the future, just like the ideal woman of the past, must be the good wife, the good mother, the mother who is able to bear, and to a rear, a number of healthy children.”⁶⁴ Roosevelt thus employed biopolitical discourses of eugenics and pronatalism to increase public scrutiny of women's education and professionalization as a means to repair the ideological fault lines manifested by this emerging figure of rupture (the New

⁶² Lovett, *Conceiving the Future*, p. 92.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Woman). This strategy increased surveillance of, specifically, white, middle-class women's bodies and reproductive practices by insinuating that the emergent social positions for these women were not only in conflict with residual understandings of the relation between woman and mother but that they somehow impaired or injured that relation.⁶⁵ If the challenge to dominant gender ideology during the postbellum, turn-of-the-century period threatened to denaturalize the relation between women and childbirth and motherhood, the permeation of eugenics into popular consciousness was an attempt to repair these ideological ruptures through coercive discourses around the figure of the "dysgenic" woman/mother. This rhetoric figured the relation between women and motherhood as both disabled and disabling, resulting in either childlessness or the production of "degenerate" offspring, both of which were understood in popular discourse as signaling a loss of "health and vigor" in the "native" white body. Reading Gilman's illness in this context, then, enables an understanding of the ambivalent position of middle-class white women like Gilman—as delinquent reproducers whose own illnesses were degenerating the national body.

Second, Gilman, through her illustration of her mental pain, renders mental illness visible as a disability, in effect challenging the assumption that, in Rosemarie Garland Thomson's words, "'able-bodiedness' and its conceptual opposite, 'disability,' are self-

⁶⁵ Interestingly, as discussed by Lovett, the popularization of the teddy bear in conjunction with Roosevelt's presidency came to be regarded as a symptom of the "dysgenic" New Woman. Lovett writes, "The toys had been adopted by young women who were increasingly toting the bears in public, cuddling them at night, and using them for decoration. Teddy bears thus not only comforted children, they became a visible symbol of the transference of affection and sexuality out of the familial mold by a generation of new women. . . . it was clear that what had begun as Teddy Roosevelt's symbol of paternal masculinity had become one of feminine sexual autonomy," p. 97. She cites popular songs by female musicians about their teddy bears, as well as commentary by popular journalists critiquing the teddy bear trend.

evident physical conditions.”⁶⁶ Gilman describes her experience of mental illness as preventing her from engaging in any kind of pleasurable activity—she could not eat, “could not read nor write nor paint nor sew nor talk nor listen to talking nor anything.”⁶⁷ Although Gilman recovered from these more severe effects of her illness, she asserts that she remained permanently disabled. “The result has been a lasting loss of power, total in some directions, partial in others; the necessity for a laboriously acquired laziness foreign to both temperament and conviction, a crippled life.”⁶⁸ Gilman identifies as having a permanent disability as a result of a coercive gender ideology that constrained women’s social role to reproduction and motherhood. Her choice of words such as “laziness” alludes to the social stigma around mental illness that defines it as a moral character flaw, a propensity for self-indulgence that renders individuals unproductive and fixated on their own internal states. “Laziness” also signals social dependency, a condition construed as deviant within the dominant ideology of industrial capitalism, which emphasized individual productivity and independence. Social dependency tended to be associated with the poor and working classes, which were largely composed of new immigrants and freedmen and women. Yet middle-class illnesses such as neurasthenia were construed as having a degenerative effect on the native-born white population, rendering them less productive and more dependent. In this way, disability linked class, race, and gender in a complicated vision of biofuturity in which the debilitated bodies and minds of American subjects were imagined as a perceived threat to the economic and social health of the

⁶⁶ Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1997).

⁶⁷ Gilman, *The Living*, p. 91.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 98

nation.

Gilman juxtaposes her pain and illness with social perceptions of what it means to be sick or disabled. In introducing her illness, what she calls “nervous prostration,” she writes that “there were many who scoffed, saying it was only a name for laziness. To be recognizably ill one must be confined to one’s bed, and preferably in pain.”⁶⁹ Because the mental anguish Gilman describes is not visible or verifiable, she must continuously assert its existence, as she explains in the following passage: “But since my public activities do not show weakness, nor my writings, and since brain and nerve disorder is not visible, short of lunacy or literal ‘prostration,’ this lifetime of limitation and wretchedness, when I mention it, is flatly disbelieved.”⁷⁰ In her autobiography, then, Gilman refutes dominant social meanings of disability to suggest that it is not other and deviant but that it is central to normative human experience.

While not a “scoffer” per se, S. Weir Mitchell, the now-notorious neurologist who administered his “rest cure” to Gilman in 1887, attached a moral sanction to the type of illness Gilman describes. Mitchell was a Civil War surgeon who took an interest in nerve diseases while treating soldiers for physical symptoms resulting from wounded nerves. He transformed that experience of treating male bodies into a therapeutic model for an affluent clientele: dubbed the “rest cure” and the “west cure,” Mitchell’s two methods of care relied on traditional gender norms to both diagnose and cure neurasthenia. Although in both women and men, the disease was thought to emerge as a result of mental strain, women’s supposed weaker constitution was perceived as being more susceptible to

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 90.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 98.

minimal amounts of mental stress, whereas the debilitating demands on middle-class white men of leading the nation to new heights of civilization were thought to feminize them.⁷¹ Thus, designed for women's weaker constitution, the rest cure consisted of "seclusion, certain forms of diet, rest in bed, massage (or manipulation), and electricity."⁷² Patients were sent to bed for 6 to 8 weeks, during which time they passed prolonged periods without engaging in activities such as reading, writing, or sewing, and were even restricted from sitting up or feeding themselves; they were not permitted to see family or friends or to visit familiar environments; they were fed a high-calorie diet of numerous daily servings of milk; and they received massage and electrical stimulation to balance the muscular atrophy caused by the excessive amount of bed rest.⁷³

In *Fat and Blood*, Mitchell lays out his treatment of female nerve disorders, which he claims are most common in thin women who lack blood and who have been treated previously for "gastric, spinal, or uterine troubles."⁷⁴ Specifically, he states that the most common case is among women aged 20 to 30 who have undergone "a season of trial" or encountered a "prolonged strain," which might be caused by "emotional excitement" or more physical strains such as teaching, illness, or "some local uterine trouble," the latter of which he says will eventually appear even if it did not trigger the illness. As a result, "the woman grows pale and thin, eats little, or if she eats does not profit by it.

⁷¹ Jennifer S. Tuttle, "Rewriting the West Cure: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Owen Wister, and the Sexual Politics of Nuerasthenia," in *The Mixed Legacy of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, ed. Catherine J. Golden and Joanna Schneider Zangrando (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000).

⁷² S. Weir Mitchell, *Fat and Blood: And How to Make Them*, ed. Michael S. Kimmel (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004), p. 35; also see Jane F. Thraikill, "Doctoring the Yellow Wallpaper."

⁷³ Mitchell; see also Catherine Golden, ed., *The Captive Imagination: A Case Book on The Yellow Wallpaper* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1992).

⁷⁴ Mitchell, p. 11.

Everything wearies her...and by and by, the sofa or the bed is her only comfort.”⁷⁵

Although Mitchell treats these patients with bed rest, he also insists that languishing in bed under the care of a friend or relative is a pathway to the “moral degradation” of these young, nervous women. He associates prolonged illness with the cultivation of “self-love and selfishness,” which he claims erodes “by slow degrees the healthy mastery of which every human being should retain over her emotions and wants.”⁷⁶ Mitchell insists on authorizing, in two ways, the illnesses of these “morally depraved” young women, in the first way by removing them from the care of an “over-loving” relative or close friend whose “healthy life is absorbed by the sick life, in a manner more or less injurious to both.”⁷⁷ He describes the process whereby selfish sickness begets illness in selfless caregivers as follows:

[The patient] cannot read; the self-constituted nurse reads to her. At last light hurts her eyes; the mother [or other friend or relative] remains shut up all day in a darkened room. A draught of air is supposed to do harm, and the doors and windows are closed, and the ingenuity of kindness is taxed to imagine new sources of like trouble, until at last the window cracks are stuffed with cotton, the chimney stopped, and even the keyhole guarded. It is easy to see where this all leads to,—the nurse falls ill, and a new victim is found.⁷⁸

In Mitchell’s medical model, the only way to cure both the cycle of female moral degradation and the nervous disorder is by breaking the bond between patient and caregiver and substituting for the friend or relative a “well-trained hired nurse.” Second, Mitchell authorizes the illnesses of women by removing the voice of individual patients from his work and substituting his own proscription of and prescription for their ailments.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 31.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 31-2.

Gilman responds to this silencing of female patients in a number of media: “The Yellow Wallpaper,” her autobiography, and a short article which she published in her journal *The Forerunner* in 1913, titled “Why I Wrote the Yellow Wallpaper.” In the article, she describes her treatment by Mitchell as follows:

This wise man put me to bed and applied the rest cure, to which a still good physique responded so promptly that he concluded there was nothing much the matter with me, and sent me home with solemn advice to “live as domestic a life as far as possible,” to “have but two hours’ intellectual life a day,” and “never to touch pen, brush or pencil as long as I lived.” This was in 1887.
I went home and obeyed those directions for some three months, and came so near the border line of utter mental ruin that I could see over. Then, using the remnants of intelligence that remained, and helped by a wise friend, I cast the noted specialist’s advice to the wind and went to work again.⁷⁹

By revealing how the treatment exacerbated her illness, Gilman critiques Mitchell’s methods and instead imagines an alternative to the gender-based paradigm of treatment proposed by Mitchell—that is, she imagines a sort of “west cure” for herself.⁸⁰ As she writes in her autobiography, after months of coalescence in the west, upon returning home, “within a month I was as low as before leaving.... This was a worse horror than before, for now I saw the stark fact—that I was well while away and sick while at

⁷⁹ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “Why I Wrote ‘The Yellow Wallpaper,’” in *The Captive Imagination: A Case Book on The Yellow Wallpaper*, ed. Catherine Golden (New York: The Feminist Press, 1992).

⁸⁰ Jennifer S. Tuttle, “Rewriting the West Cure.” Thrailkill suggests that “The Yellow Wallpaper” “makes an appeal for a sex-neutral medical model.” She argues that Mitchell’s indifference to Gilman’s personal account of her illness, which she sent to him by letter, was a result of Mitchell’s theory of the relationship between mind and body in which the mind was “yet another point of ingress to a person’s physical substance, as susceptible to emotional shocks as the mucus membrane were to germs.” Thrailkill argues that an earlier generation of feminist critics, including Susan Gubar, Sandra Gilbert, Annette Kolodny, and Jean Kennard, have read “The Yellow Wallpaper” as an “exercise in gendered hermeneutics,” thereby perpetuating a mapping of the social world according to biologized gender differences; this “locat[ing] and celebrat[ing] gender distinctions in an extra-corporeal domain of female production” is contrary to Gilman’s own views that “there is no female mind” anymore than there is “a female liver,” Thrailkill, “Doctoring the Yellow Wallpaper” p. 528.

home.”⁸¹ Gilman’s association of her illness with domesticity establishes the domestic sphere as a space of ill health for women. She also links the west and westward migration with healthy American bodies, including her own, and thereby challenges Mitchell’s prescription of gendered cures that reinforced normative gender roles. For women, the rest cure “enforced passivity, submission, and domesticity in order to discipline wayward women like Gilman into what was considered properly feminine, [while] the West Cure urged supposedly feminized men to embrace the more ‘masculine’ traits and pursuits embodied in a western model of manliness” which included engaging in outdoor sports like hiking and working on dude ranches.⁸² Gilman, in her imperial fantasy *Herland*, undoes the gendering of U.S. expansionism in, for example, Panama. That is, she reworks Mitchell’s west cure by envisioning a female colonial space where white women’s bodies have been restored to health through their separation from men and, ironically, from the racialized indigenous population.

Hygienic Modernity: U.S. Imperialism, Masculinity, and National Health

As Warwick Anderson argues in *Colonial Pathologies*, American colonies such as the Philippines functioned as a “laboratory of hygienic modernity” where the military and the medical merged through the control of bodily practices and the disciplining of physical contact between the bodies of American soldiers and colonial subjects, and the bodies of American soldiers and the contagious environment.⁸³ U.S. expansionism, then,

⁸¹ Gilman, *The Living*, p. 95.

⁸² Ibid, p. 105. Mitchell’s male patients included Henry and William James, Owen Wister, Theodore Dreiser, and Teddy Roosevelt.

⁸³ Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the*

is the third element, along with nativism and eugenics, that informs biofuturity, the turn-of-the-century biological vision of national illness and health. Both nativism and expansionism were responses to cycles of economic depression that began in the 1880s and culminated in a severe depression from 1893 to 1897, with nativism advocating domestic isolationism and expansionism promoting aggressive military intervention abroad.⁸⁴ Eugenics contributed to the augmentation of racism and anxiety over the cultural assimilation of immigrants and imperial subjects. This new racial ideology relied on pseudoscientific derivatives of evolutionary and genetic science, such as eugenics, in claiming to objectively quantify racial differences and thereby “prove” the superiority of white Anglo-Saxons.⁸⁵ This racial ideology structured the discourse of both pro- and anti-imperialists in the U.S.; as Eric T.L. Love argues, pro-imperialists in the U.S. tended to adopt the paternalistic Northern rhetoric of “mission, duty, assimilation, and uplift,” rather than the extremism of Southern racism, to advocate for the annexation and subjugation of colonial territories and subjects.⁸⁶ This rhetoric justified imperialist expansion by asserting that as it was scientifically proven that white Anglos were the superior race; it was their duty to uplift the other, inferior races—a sort of melding of the white man’s burden with the civilizing mission. Whereas pro-imperialists in the U.S. harnessed racist ideologies to justify colonial wars in the name of both racial uplift and the reinvigoration of national health, anti-imperialists also relied on this pseudoscientific ideology of white supremacy to caution against colonial expansion. Anti-imperialists

Philippines (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁸⁴ Higham, *Strangers in the Land*.

⁸⁵ I am drawing here on the Eric T.L. Love, *Race Over Empire: Racism and U.S., Imperialism, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

opposed annexation of lands in places such as the Philippines, where the inhabitants were believed to be inferior and thus unfit for self-government, in part to guard against the influx of people of color from colonial spaces, who were perceived as inassimilable.

Treatments such as Mitchell's west cure, then, can be understood in this framework as part of larger structure of signification in which white men were cured of the debilitating effects of overcivilization through a "re-masculating" encounter with a frontier space devoid of white women and inhabited by the racialized subjects of U.S. imperialism. While this "treatment" for degenerate masculinity often took place in more controlled environments such as national parks or dude ranches, it might also be understood as a subtext of the discourse surrounding U.S. expansionism during and after the Spanish-American War. Whereas U.S. empire building provided new settings for public health projects such as the eradication of tropical diseases in Panama and the Philippines, it also paralleled concerns at home over the health of the national body as a result of the perceived degeneration of individual Anglo bodies. This domestic discourse of national health and fitness grew in conjunction with rapid U.S. colonial expansion. After the Civil War, empire became both a strategy by which to guarantee economic, and thus social, stability through securing markets for excess industrial and agricultural goods, as well as a proxy for unification after the failure of Reconstruction. As I argued earlier, cycles of economic boom and bust from 1870 through the first world war displaced both urban and rural workers and fueled nativist movements. Furthermore, as Amy Kaplan argues in her article "Black and Blue on San Juan Hill," the Spanish-American War was discursively constructed as a "road to reunion" in that, in the wake of

the Civil War, it promised to “reunify the nation by bringing together the North and the South against a common external enemy.”⁸⁷

Rather than serving to heal the wounded masculinity of white men, however, U.S. wars in, for instance, the Philippines and Cuba revealed the ideological ruptures driving these eugenic-nativist discourses of national health. That is, on the one hand, white men were supposed to be restored to health and thus “remasculated” through contact with the colonial frontier. However, at the same time, it was feared that colonial environments had negative effects on white bodies. For instance, sociologists such as Edward Ross, in the annual address previously discussed, argues that the nature of the colonial relation is dependent on the colonizers “climatic adaptability,” as follows:

Just now is the grave question whether the flourishing and teeming peoples of the North Temperate zones can provide outlets for their surplus population in the rich but undeveloped lands of the tropics....Can the white man work and multiply in the tropics, or will his rôle be limited to commercial and industrial exploitation at a safe distance by means of a changing, male contingent of soldiers, officials, business agents, planters and overseers?...The answer is not yet sure, but the bearing on acclimatization are not comforting to our race. Immunity from the fevers that waste men in hot, humid climates seems to be in inverse ration to energy....With all their energy and their numbers, the Anglo-Saxons appear to be physiologically inelastic, and incapable of making of Guiana or the Philippines a home such as they have made in New Zealand or Minnesota. In the tropics, their very virtues—their push, their uncompromising standards, their aversion to intermarriage with the natives—are their destruction.⁸⁸

Ross here clearly connects the “success” of colonialism with the ability to control the environment, to make these tropical spaces safe and sanitary for white settlement through the eradication of diseases. Yet he also casts doubt on the physical constitution of the

⁸⁷ Amy Kaplan, “Black and Blue on San Juan Hill,” in *Cultures of U.S. Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 219.

⁸⁸ Ross, p. 69.

white body itself as incapable of thriving in tropical climates and suggests that acclimatization is only possible at the “frightful cost of a new race variety by climatic selection.”⁸⁹ That is, only the whites who are more fit for the environment will survive, at the cost of many lives.

White bodies in colonial space, then, presented an ideological quandary, particularly, for example, in the presence of black U.S. soldiers. As Amy Kaplan has argued, black soldiers in Cuba mediated between both white soldiers and Cuban soldiers, and white soldiers and a “contagious environment” to which black soldiers were thought to be immune.⁹⁰ She notes that “more men died of dysentery, malaria, and food poisoning from army rations in Cuba than they did fighting the Spanish-American War.”⁹¹ This brought into question the position of African Americans in relation both to the (reconstructed) nation and to colonial subjects annexed as a result of the Spanish-American War. Masculinity had to be denied to both African American soldiers and colonial soldiers in order to restore white masculinity to health and vitality, by reasserting the domestic racial logic in these new imperial spaces and eliding Cubans and African Americans. This functioned to justify the subjugation of people of color at home and abroad.

As Warwick Anderson’s work on the U.S.-Philippine War reveals, American

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Interestingly, in “Black and Blue on San Juan Hill,” Kaplan notes that Lamarckian theories of heredity were used to support the conscription of African American troops, who were thought to be closer in physical constitution to the indigenous inhabitants of the imperial battlegrounds. Known as the “Immune Regiments,” African American soldiers were thought to be immune to tropical diseases and were thus given some of the worst duties. Yet they could also “serve as a buffer between the white soldiers and the contagious environment and allow the spectacle of the restored white male body to emerge unscathed by the physical and political landscape,” p. 232.

⁹¹ Ibid.

whiteness and masculinity were insulated and controlled as a means to preserve whiteness within the tropics. That is, regulated personal hygiene was thought to protect white soldiers from both the climate and its particular illnesses, and from “going native.” Colonial medical officers policed not only the bodies of natives but also the bodies and habits of American soldiers (who, according to Anderson, were primarily white), as it was suspected that even non-venereal social contact could lead to the contraction of venereal disease. Medical officers “attempted to manage the selection, conduct, clothing, diet, and personal hygiene of soldiers in order to build up resisting powers and strengthen the constitution. In multiple ways, then, the military sanitarian was delimiting the boundaries of whiteness in the Philippines, counterposing it to an unwholesome and morbid climate and ecology, and thus refiguring what it would mean to be a real white man—a vigorous American citizen-soldier—in the tropics.”⁹² Ironically, however, this regime of hygiene had the opposite effect: it weakened and sickened the American soldier; as Anderson reveals, the American soldier in the Philippines suffered from severe bouts of depression and nostalgia. This illness was often interpreted by medical officers as a result of the weather and environment in the tropics, which were thought to have a degenerative effect on white bodies.⁹³

Gilman’s work brings together U.S. expansionism with domestic nativism and eugenic discourses of biological degeneration. In fact, we might read Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” and *Herland* as complimentary texts. While the former employs

⁹² Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies*, p. 44.

⁹³ Ironically, the U.S. began to use Chinese laborers to transport Army medical supplies for the field hospitals as litter-bearers, as the Chinese were thought better able to withstand performing heavy manual labor in the intense heat. Chinese labor, then, domestically and in the colonies, might be read as signifying the limits of white masculinity.

racial metaphors of Yellow Peril to critique the debilitating effects of both domestic ideology and the patriarchal medical profession on women, the latter imagines a frontier space of health where white women can embody traits and engage in physical pursuits that were gendered male and therefore off limits to women. In “The Yellow Wallpaper,” Gilman depicts a young mother suffering from postpartum depression and her subsequent relegation by her physician-husband to Mitchell-style bed rest in the attic nursery of a country home. The woman gradually goes mad and racially degenerates from inactivity, for she is denied any occupation as a cure for the “hysterical exhaustion” ostensibly brought on by too much mental strain.

In *Herland*, Gilman inverts the infantilization of women and the scientific scrutiny of their bodies. She transforms the women of Herland into effective colonists who have conquered the indigenous population and built an ultramodern imperial city. After Van, Terry, and Jeff penetrate the isolated nation, they resist the surge of women that steadily marshals them to a towering, prison-like fortress. The men are subdued by the women and carried into the fortress, “borne inside, struggling manfully,” where they are adjudicated and chloroformed. The narrator of the novel, Van, describes his “awakening” from the anesthesia as “from a slumber as deep as death, as refreshing as that of a healthy child,” in a chamber with three beds, one for each of the immobilized explorers.⁹⁴ The room is described as “a big room, high and wide, with many lofty windows whose closed blinds let through soft green-lit air; a beautiful room, in

⁹⁴ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “Herland,” in *Herland and Selected Stories*, ed. Barbara H. Solomon (New York: Signet, 1992), p. 26. All references to *Herland* refer to this edition.

proportion, in color, in smooth simplicity; a scent of blossoming gardens outside.”⁹⁵ The room recalls the nursery in Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper,” which is also described as “a big, airy room, with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine galore....Out of one of the windows, I can see a garden.”⁹⁶ In fact, one of the exploring trio, Terry, exclaims upon awakening that the men “have been stripped and washed and put to bed like so many yearling babies—by these highly civilized women.”⁹⁷ In *Herland*, then, men are made to undergo the infantilization that women experience(d) at the hands of medical practitioners. Thus, *Herland* should be read as imagining U.S. colonies as contradictory spaces of national health, where middle-class white women are freed from the domestic oppression of patriarchy and removed from potentially debilitating contact with “dissonant publics” of immigrants, freedmen and women, the working classes, and so forth. In the novel, then, Gilman puts forth a vision of biofuturity—of improved individual bodies and thus of national fitness—that is both nativist and imperialist, and that draws on the images of national health and racial betterment that Gilman witnessed at the PPIE.

Reimagining the Gender of Imperialism in *Herland*

The narrative utopia has, since its emergence as a genre with More’s *Utopia*, been a primary medium for imagining the modern nation-state. In the postbellum U.S., the utopian novel was a vehicle through which a range of authors envisioned a collective national future and a common national subjectivity as a means of facilitating recovery

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 27.

⁹⁶ Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper,” p. 167-68.

⁹⁷ Gilman, *Herland*, p. 27.

from the trauma of the Civil War and of maintaining a sense of cohesion during a period of social upheaval and unrest. Rather than reuniting the nation, the end of the Civil War initiated a period of social, economic, and political schism in which the U.S. had become fragmented by “a cacophony of competing nations,...dissonant publics, and individual voices.”⁹⁸ Between 1886 and 1896, more than 100 works of utopian fiction were published, about 20 popular dystopias were written between 1880 and 1900, and from 1890 through 1910, more than thirty American women wrote utopian novels.⁹⁹ While many of the authors of these works now languish in obscurity, canonical authors of the period such as William Dean Howells, Edward Bellamy, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Jack London wrote utopian works alongside their realist fiction.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, realist and utopian fiction can be understood as parallel genres; as Thomas Peyser argues, “both aim to displace social arrangements by revealing their self-contradictions and genealogy. Consequently, both modes are also essentially oriented toward the future, as their attacks on the existent are—usually, in any case—motivated by a desire for change rather than by a purposeless, deconstructive glee.”¹⁰¹ Both realist and utopian fiction are produced from “the negative side” of contemporary history, as a reaction to concurrent social conflicts and transformations.¹⁰² That negative side is always present in the text, creating a

⁹⁸ Wegner, *Imaginary Communities*, p. 72.

⁹⁹ I am relying here on Jean Pfaelzer’s very thorough study of utopian fiction during this period, *The Utopian Novel in America 1886-1896: The Politics of Form* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984).

¹⁰⁰ For example, Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward* (1888), William Dean Howells, *A Traveler From Altruria* (1894), and Jack London, *The Iron Heel* (1908). Contemporary utopian novels by women include Mary E. Bradley Lane’s *Mizora: A Prophecy* (1881) and Inez Haynes Gillmore’s *Angel Island* (1914), both of which have been cited as inspirations for Gilman’s *Herland*.

¹⁰¹ Thomas Peyser, *Utopia and Cosmopolis: Globalization in the Era of American Literary Realism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 10.

¹⁰² Louis Marin, *Utopics: The Semiological Play of Textual Spaces* (Amherst: NY: Humanity Books), 1990.

narrative tension that both masks and reveals fundamental conflicts in ideology at specific historical moments. However, through its envisioning of imagined resolutions to these conflicts, utopian fiction can be understood as a narrative space in which untheorized social emergences of the narrative's present can be represented. I am particularly interested in exploring the biopolitical impulse of these progressive utopian visions—that is, how these works resolved ideological contradictions in and through the body. That is, utopian fiction contains the seeds of biopolitics in its refiguring of the national body through the homogenization and assimilation of “other” bodies into a vision of the normative American.

Utopian thinking not only was central to literary genres of the period but also was an integral component of Progressive Era social, cultural, and political movements more broadly; for example, settlement houses, civil rights movement, and world fairs were all part of a constellation of thinking that was founded on imagining the improvement of social relations and thus the national future. The body and the eugenic impetus to breed better people were central to these utopian projects, which are thus inextricably bound up in discourses of biofuturity. In fact, we can read eugenics as a sort of utopian fantasy of biological improvement as a means to achieve what Lennard Davis calls the “utopia of the norm,” that is, “the hegemonic vision of what the body should be.”¹⁰³ This normative biological ideal depended on assimilating or weeding out deviant subjects—people of color, immigrants, women, gays and lesbians, and the working class—while encouraging the proliferation of native-born middle-class whites. As I will discuss below, both

¹⁰³ Davis, p. 8.

Gilman's novel *Herland* and the PPIE put forth visions of *utopia*—of good places that are no place. Gilman's fictional female fortress and the PPIE's transient urban microcosm of the City Beautiful movement both imagine perfected, futuristic spaces, central to which is the fantasy of biologically perfected inhabitants.

In *Herland*, Gilman imagines an embodied resolution to the social tensions of the Progressive Era, specifically through the improvement of the body with eugenic science.¹⁰⁴ Her eugenic vision mediates between the contradictory discourses of nativism and imperialism that structure the novel. In this light, then, *Herland*'s location within the South American "tropics" cannot be read as incidental; rather, we must read it as a way to understand Gilman's racialized vision of the future. Other critics have read Gilman's work in this context. For example, in "She in *Herland*: Feminism as Fantasy," Susan Gubar argues that Gilman renames and reclaims H. Rider Haggard's imperial romance in order to confront the misogyny inherent to the colonial fantasy.¹⁰⁵ Bridgett Bennett contends the novel interrogates how narratives of discovery come to be written; in fact, the first sentence of the novel advises readers of the unreliability of Van's story, as he is narrating from memory because he was not able to bring with him the material he "so carefully prepared....whole books full of notes, carefully copied records, firsthand descriptions, and the pictures."¹⁰⁶ Thomas Peyser reads *Herland* as an imperial ghetto

¹⁰⁴ While *Herland* is written later than many of the utopian texts in the decades leading up to the turn of the twentieth century, I see the text as a culmination of Gilman's work as a social activist and intellectual, which began in earnest in 1888 when she left her husband, moved west to Pasadena, and began to write prolifically.

¹⁰⁵ Susan Gubar, "She in *Herland*: Feminism as Fantasy," in *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: The Woman and Her Work*, ed. Sheryl L. Meyering (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989).

¹⁰⁶ Bridgett Bennett, "Pockets of Resistance: Gender and Genre Boundaries in *Herland*," in *A Very Different Story: Studies on the Fiction of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, ed. Val Gough and Jill Rudd (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 1998); Gilman, *Herland*, p. 3.

that is immune from the effects of patriarchy as well as globalization.¹⁰⁷ Kristin Carter-Sanborn suggests that in her novel, Gilman imagines maternal violence as a means to secure U.S. imperial domination.¹⁰⁸ In company with these scholars, I read *Herland* in the context of U.S. imperialism, specifically as a retelling of the colonial history of the U.S. *Herland* is a racially pure imperial garden where Gilman rewrites the nationalist myth of the “errand in the wilderness” through a feminist lens which renders *Herland* women both as indigenous subjects vulnerable to the incursions of white male explorers and as colonialists themselves. However, I hope to add to these earlier readings an examination of the biopolitical aspect of this imagined imperial errand.

The story of *Herland* is narrated by Van Dyke Jennings, a sociologist who is part of a three-man team of scientist-explorers who set out in search of a land in South America rumored to be inhabited only by women. The three men, in fact, are all “interested in science” and include Terry the explorer (“who used to make all kinds of a row because there was nothing left to explore now”¹⁰⁹), Jeff the doctor, and Van the sociologist. Van and his companions set out to discover *Herland*: “We three had a chance to join a big scientific expedition....The expedition was up among the enormous hinterland of a great river, up where the maps had to be made, savage dialects studied, and all manner of strange flora and fauna expected.”¹¹⁰ The context of scientific exploration alludes to both the colonial history of the U.S. and recent U.S. expansion in the Philippines, Cuba, and Panama, as previously discussed. The men assume they will

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Peyser, *Utopia and Cosmopolis*.

¹⁰⁸ Kristin Carter-Sanborn, “Restraining Order.”

¹⁰⁹ Gilman, *Herland*, 3.

¹¹⁰ Gilman, *Herland*, 4.

easily subdue the “savage” women but are instead taken captive and forced to examine their attitudes about sex differences. While in captivity, the men learn that the inhabitants of Herland (which is both geographically and racially dichotomized between the “civilized” women of Herland and the “savage” natives) had been what Herlanders call a “bisexual race”—comprised of both men and women—until in the midst of war a volcanic eruption walled off the pass between Herland and the male soldiers who were away, engaged in battle. Few “Herlandian” men were left alive, and those who were died in a revolt led by indigenous slaves. On the brink of being conquered by men of the slave caste, the women, those “infuriated virgins,” refused interracial reproduction, rose up, and slew their would-be conquerors. In the span of only about ten years, a woman miraculously (without sexual intercourse) gave birth to a daughter, founding what would become a new race of 155 parthenogenic women.¹¹¹

Gilman’s structuring of the story through the eyes of Van, a sociologist and the narrator of the story, is a sort of narrative cross-dressing for Gilman, as Gilman defined herself professionally as a sociologist. Van becomes the vehicle through which Gilman puts forth her vision of perfected social relations while critically diagnosing the root of social ills in the U.S. Gilman argued for the collaboration of sociologists and reformers in a short piece titled “The Sociologist and the Reformer.”¹¹² Here, she writes, “Sociology is as practical a science as Physiology. And unless connected with Social Hygiene, Therapeutics, and general Progress, it has no reason for existence.”¹¹³ She

¹¹¹ Gilman, “Herland,” p. 82.

¹¹² Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Sociologist and the Reformer,” *The Forerunner* 6 (1915). Reprinted by Greenwood Reprint Corp., New York, 1968.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

understood the role of the sociologist as inextricably bound to social reform, for it was the sociologist who possessed the knowledge that could better inform the work of the reformer. Interestingly, she emphasizes “social hygiene,” in effect calling attention to the biopolitical aspect of social work by framing it as the disinfecting of the national body.

Van, the narrator, is a sort of vanishing mediator, the dialectical synthesis between Gilman’s utopian world and the contemporary U.S. He brings together these two worlds to enable the reader to imagine the possibility of something new, as in the following passage:

We had expected a dull submissive monotony, and found a daring social inventiveness far beyond our own, and a mechanical and scientific development fully equal to ours. We had expected pettiness, and found a social consciousness besides which our nations looked like quarreling children—feeble-minded ones at that. We had expected jealousy, and found a broad, sisterly affection, a fair-minded intelligence, to which we could produce no parallel. We had expected hysteria, and found a standard of health and vigor, a calmness of temper, to which the habit of profanity, for instance, was impossible to explain—we tried it.

Here, through Van, Gilman deconstructs biases about women that proliferated during the era. Gilman in essence employs eugenic metaphors of disability in Van’s diagnosis of contemporary ills in the U.S., which is described as a nation of “feeble-minded” in contrast to the “health and vigor” of Herland’s population. Specifically, it is gender segregation, this passage suggests, that has physically debilitated the nation; Gilman conjures the usual suspects of the period, “feeble-mindedness” and “hysteria,” popular eugenic signifiers for the disease of “hypercivilization,” and to which women were understood as particularly susceptible. As a male scientist, Van lends an authoritative voice to the possibility that national unity might be achieved by integrating women into

the political apparatus and that this in turn would restore the nation to “health and vigor.” Gilman’s strategy to constantly invoke the “negative side” of Herland, the contemporary U.S. and its many social ills, as an absent historical referent renders *Herland* both a familiar and estranged national landscape.

The reader’s first glimpse of Herland is through the eyes of Gilman’s three explorers from the men’s biplane. The aerial viewing of Herland is significant, as Bridgett Bennett argues, in that it emphasizes the cultural distance within the colonial encounter that links patriarchal, imperial ideology with the use of technology.¹¹⁴ This distance in effect structures the narrative tension in Gilman’s colonial world of Herland. The men’s aerial vantage point enables them to penetrate the dense forest in order to get the “lay of the land,” as Van remarks. From their almost omnipotent position, the men assert control over the physical space of Herland by drawing and measuring the perimeter of the secluded country, a control they expect to also exercise over the people of Herland. From their assessment of the landscape, they make assumptions about the cultural configuration of Herland: the presence of cities, roads, and park-like meadows, for example, leads the men to conclude the inhabitants must include men and must be civilized (which can be understood as code for white). Gilman thus articulates a way of seeing that reveals the coercion and violent appropriation central to the colonial encounter. Yet while she grants agency to the natives who reside in Herland, Gilman elides race and gender by making the colonial subjects white women; in Gilman’s colony, the “natives” constitute the advanced civilization, while the would-be colonizers, the

¹¹⁴ Bennett, “Pockets of Resistance,” p. 43.

American male explorers, represent the backward barbarians. Although this inverts the dominant narratives of “civilizing” colonial projects, it also transfigures the racial violence that constituted U.S. imperialism during this period as violence against white women.

Upon the men’s first glimpse of Herland, Van describes the place as “a land in a state of perfect cultivation, where even the forests looked like they were cared for; a land that looked like an enormous park, only it was even more evidently an enormous garden.”¹¹⁵ Gilman’s imaging of Herland as a garden is illustrative of her entrenchment in a biopolitics that fuses eugenics, imperialism, and nativism in imagining national and transnational bodies. As Zygmunt Bauman argues, the garden is a structuring metaphor of the modern state’s relation to its citizen-subjects:

The modern state was a gardening state. Its stance was a gardening stance. It delegitimized the present (wild, uncultivated) condition of the population and dismantled the extant mechanisms of reproduction and self-balancing. It put in their place purposely built mechanisms meant to point the change in the direction of the rational design. The design, presumed to be dictated by the supreme and unquestionable authority of Reason, supplied the criteria to evaluate present-day reality. These criteria split the population into useful plants to be encouraged and tenderly propagated, and weeds—to be removed or rooted out. They put a premium on the needs of the useful plants...and disendowed the needs of those declared to be weeds. They cast both categories as objects of action and denied to both the rights of self-determining agents.¹¹⁶

The metaphor of the garden as a space in which the impetus to order is brought to fruition is useful for understanding both how eugenic discourse functions in Gilman’s novel and how it operated within the U.S. at a moment in which the social order was disrupted and

¹¹⁵ Gilman, *Herland*, p. 13.

¹¹⁶ Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 20

in flux. Gilman employs the metaphor of the garden to both undermine the authority of popular social science discourse, including eugenics, as a means of ordering knowledge of the world, while at the same time reifying this authority by casting the garden as an imaginative, utopian space of perfected social relations. The garden functions as a way to mediate the contradictions between the discourses of liberalism and the nationalistic fervor driving eugenic nativism and U.S. imperial expansion, and provides a mode of toleration for the denial of rights for and the elimination of bodies that cannot be assimilated into the liberal state.

Upon taking in this orderly, cultivated landscape of Herland, the men exclaim that “this is a *civilized* country” and that, of course, “there must be men,” again linking the physical organization of the state with the privileging of a specific type of body.¹¹⁷ The men land the plane and begin to explore the territory on foot and are astonished by the architectural verve of the strange new place, the place the men dub “Herland” (readers never learn what the women call their nation). Van exclaims that “he is from California, and there’s no country lovelier, but when it comes to towns—[he had] often groaned at home to see the offensive mess man made in the face of nature.”¹¹⁸ Herland, they observe, is “like an exposition,” without smoke, dirt, or noise—“everything was beauty, order, perfect cleanness”; as Terry exclaims, “this is no savage country.”¹¹⁹ Thus, although located amidst a tropical jungle, Herland is an oasis of civilization; the tropical environment has been contained and reordered, even to the extent that “pests” have been

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 20.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 21.

eradicated.¹²⁰ Herland then can be read as a model of successful colonialism in which the tropical environment has been remodeled to meet the needs of its Anglo inhabitants.

Reproducing the Eugenic Body

Gilman's vision of reproduction in *Herland* subverts the authority of male purveyors of medicalized knowledge of childbirth by creating a world in which women reproduce parthenogenetically. As men increasingly became practitioners of midwifery and then of obstetrics and gynecology, women's biology, defined by the womb, became the focal point of the medical discipline, and its natural functions such as menstruation and childbirth began to be represented as disorders in need of medical treatment.¹²¹

Gilman's representation of pregnancy and childbirth offers an alternative vision of medicalized reproduction; it suggests the value of placing control over reproduction in the hands of women themselves, at a moment when the debate over birth control was climaxing. In *Herland*, parthenogenesis returns control over the process of reproduction to women. With the transition from women-controlled practices of midwifery to male-dominated obstetrics and gynecology, women's experiential knowledge of the processes of pregnancy and childbirth was supplanted by medical science. The experience of parthenogenesis in *Herland*, then, restores women to a position of agency, yet at the same time, it mystifies reproduction. Reproduction becomes "a direct gift from the gods," unhinged from human sexuality. That is, it defies the principles of biology and offers no alternative scientific explanation for how the women reproduce.

¹²⁰ Pests include insects and even dogs.

¹²¹ Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

This vision of reproduction is predicated on Gilman's inculcation in a cultural fabric of biofuturity. She argues in an article in *The Forerunner* titled "Birth Control" that excessive childbearing was making mothers "unfit to perform the very functions for which their bodies are specially constructed."¹²² She advocates that "reputable physicians or other competent persons [should] teach proper methods of such [birth] restrictions" as the most effective means of countering "degradation of the stock."¹²³ This emphasis on eugenic breeding is the core of her novel *Herland*. As Van and his companions learn, Herlanders practice their own form of "race betterment" by genetically "refining" their births: "Very early they recognized the need of improvement as well as mere repetition, and devoted their combined intelligence to that problem—how to make the best kind of people."¹²⁴ While all women in Herland possess the ability to give birth, the women practice a sort of birth control that allows Herland to restrict its population, to focus on quality rather than quantity. This might be understood as a type of "negative eugenics" in which unwanted, excessive, and potentially degenerate births are prevented.¹²⁵ In Herland, that "mighty garden," the same strategies used to cultivate food are applied to the cultivation of people. In comparison with children in the U.S., Van laments, "Those nation-loved children of theirs compared with the average in our country as the most perfectly cultivated, richly developed roses compare with—tumbleweeds."¹²⁶ Again, Gilman employs metaphors of the garden to cultivate her biofuturist vision, in

¹²² Gilman, "Birth Control," *The Forerunner*, 6, No. 7, p. 178.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

¹²⁴ Gilman, *Herland*, p. 61.

¹²⁵ Although Herlanders finding the prospect of abortion "revolting," I argue that Gilman is imagining a type of negative eugenics through the state-mandated birth control the women practice, which prevents undesirable or "unfit" babies from being born.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

which the women of Herland use genetic technology to grow better bodies, which in turn are more receptive to education. The fruition of this eugenic garden is able-bodied, fit members of society.

Van and his companions learn that when Herlanders faced a crisis of overpopulation, they practiced a type negative eugenics by foregoing reproduction.

Before a child comes to one of us, there is a period of utter exaltation—the whole being is uplifted and filled with a concentrated desire for that child. We learned to look forward to that period with the greatest caution. Often our young women, those to who motherhood had not yet come, would voluntarily defer it. When the deep, inner demand for a child began to be felt she would deliberately engage in the most active work, physical and mental; and even more important, would solace her longing by the direct care and service of the babies we already had.¹²⁷

To secure racial progress, potential mothers suppress—upon order by the state—their reproductive impulse until social conditions are ripe for the augmentation of the national body. This “answer” to the fear of race suicide imagines women bearing only as many children for whom they have both the physical and financial resources to care. Gilman’s reproductive vision is thus predicated on a feminism that recasts women as central to the active creation of a better national body—what she calls “Conscious Makers of People.” It is a feminism that is also grounded in a eugenic politics in which women are cast as the primary agents of racial “purity,” imperial domination, and nationalism. For instance, this anxiety over “the pressure of population,” as Gilman refers to it in both *Herland* and “Birth Control,” is echoed in U.S. colonial strategies in Puerto Rico during the early decades of the twentieth century. U.S. economic imperialism that supplanted indigenous forms of subsistence in Puerto Rico generated mass unemployment. This unemployment

¹²⁷ Gilman, *Herland*, p. 71.

was framed not as a consequence of colonialism but as a result of contemporary Puerto Rican poverty and overpopulation. This discourse of overpopulation was used to justify the U.S.'s widespread use of sterilization in Puerto Rico in the 1920s and 1930s. As Laura Briggs' work reveals, "science, medicine, and social science have produced racial difference through descriptions of and interventions upon women's bodies, particularly through their sexuality and reproduction."¹²⁸

Herland's negative eugenics echoes the eugenic strategies employed at home, as well as in colonial territories such as Puerto Rico. Some women are forced to forego reproduction completely if they exhibit deviant or degenerate qualities, in order to "breed out...the lowest types":

When a girl showing the bad qualities had still the power to appreciate social duty, we appealed to her, by that, to renounce motherhood. Some of the few worse types were, fortunately, unable to reproduce. But if the fault was in a disproportionate egotism—then the girl was sure she had the right to have children, even that hers would be better than others.¹²⁹

Gilman's *Herland* might be read as uniting two primary examples of the modernist compulsion to order and classify, eugenics and colonialism. Within the text, the impulse to differentiate is masked semantically by the insistence by the women of Herland that they are all mothers, although only some women actually give birth to children and even fewer are given the role of mother, of educator of children, a role that is accorded the

¹²⁸ Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2002), p. 15. Briggs argues that "in order to govern and perhaps even populate a far-flung empire, Europeans had to be able to survive in the tropics long-term, and to reproduce themselves (i.e., to reproduce white people), or so it seemed to the colonizing Europeans. At a minimum, soldiers and colonial officers could not return to the metropolis so debilitated or diseased that they were incapable of reproduction even outside the colony...a combination of venereal disease in men and 'tropical neurasthenia,' or simply 'tropical sterility,' in women was making reproduction by colonials impossible," p. 34.

¹²⁹ Gilman, *Herland*, p. 83.

highest status in the land. “Child-rearing has come to be with us a culture so profoundly studied, practiced with such subtlety and skill, that the more we love our children the less we are willing to trust that process to unskilled hands—even our own!”¹³⁰ The ordering within Herland then attempts to exclude the ambivalent, women whose bodies exceed or defy classification, from reproduction, which in Herland—and arguably in the U.S. in this historical moment—is the primary mode of participation in the state, while mothering is reserved for only a select few. By extending this project to the level of genes, the women of Herland secure against racial degeneracy and produce better bodies, which, in Gilman’s biofuturist paradigm, also guarantees resolution of social conflict.

Paradoxically, although Herland originated through violent colonial warfare, the women celebrate their rejection of the violence of war and imperialism as a solution to overpopulation: “Neither did they start off on predatory excursions to get more land from somebody else, or to get more food from somebody else, to maintain their struggling mass.”¹³¹ While this could be read as an implicit critique of imperialism, Gilman’s vision of the future relies on often-violent colonial relations to both defamiliarize contemporary U.S. society and alter historical memory. It is important for Gilman to create a racial genealogy between the women of Herland and white Anglo Americans. As Van says of Herlanders, “there is no doubt in my mind these people were of Aryan stock, and were once in contact with the best civilizations of the old world. They were ‘white,’ but somewhat darker than our northern races because of their constant exposure to sun and

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 84.

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 69.

air.”¹³² Gilman creates a genealogy between white Anglo Americans and the women of Herland which omits the original moment of colonial contact. By neglecting to begin at the beginning, Gilman thus naturalizes an “Aryan” presence in Latin America, erasing two centuries of colonialism and westward expansion. By locating the imagined space of Herland in Latin America, Gilman conjures an isolated place for white women to engage in “pure” reproduction, in response to what she perceived as the proliferation of ethnic and racial others in the U.S. As discussed previously, Gilman perceived the U.S. as increasingly in need of isolating itself as a way to prevent miscegenation and the subsequent “degeneration” of the Anglo race. *Herland* thus can be read as an imaginative exercise in isolationism in which Gilman creates a safe, healthy space for whiteness paradoxically by transplanting white bodies to indigenous spaces.

The social value assigned to improving the health of children and thereby cultivating “better babies” was also visible at the PPIE. A children’s health exhibit, installed under the direction of Dr. Anna Strong of the Children’s Bureau of the Department of Labor in the Palace of Education, venerated “scientific care” of children.¹³³ According to Todd, the exhibit “reached out for the mothers and babies. By lectures and by individual advice, it sought to spread a proper knowledge of child care....Mothers were encouraged to bring their children and find out what was the matter with them, or if there was nothing the matter, then how their vital advantage might be increased and protected.”¹³⁴ Other aspects of the exhibit included daily children’s health conferences, free medical examinations of children younger than 15, advice on removal

¹³² Ibid, p. 56.

¹³³ Strong organized various conventions and exhibits as part of her “baby conservation” efforts.

¹³⁴ Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, vol. 4, p. 45.

of adenoids and tonsils, and directions about diet. Two days a week, five mothers and their children were given free entrance to the fair so the children could receive free medical exams. During the course of the fair, hundreds of babies were examined and comparatively “scored” on various measures. Mothers were given directions on the optimal care and feeding of children, which included lessons in preparing baby food. Improving the health of babies was even the core of one of the most popular exhibits in the Joy Zone, or the carnival area of the fair. Dr. M.A. Couney’s Infant Incubator, ornamented by Hungarian storks in the anterior garden, contained premature babies that “had to be kept in warm glass chambers awhile so they could get a better start.”¹³⁵

This parallel between Gilman’s *Herland* and the PPIE, a utopian space within the newly reconstructed city of San Francisco, is one example of the influence the fair might have had on Gilman in crafting her novel. I propose that Gilman modeled the physical space of *Herland* as well as the vision of racial betterment in part on the 1915 fair and its emphasis on biological improvement. While Gilman describes *Herland* as a “garden” and an “exposition,” descriptions of the fairgrounds illustrate that visitors entering the exposition find themselves in “a great garden 3,000 feet in length.”¹³⁶ Throughout the fair, public health exhibits promoting medical advances were interspersed with exhibits on colonial sanitation projects in, for example, Cuba and the Philippines. Gilman visited the fair herself and wrote about it in both *The Forerunner* and *With Her in Ourland*, the sequel to *Herland*. In an article Gilman wrote on the fair, she celebrates its potential to serve as a model to improve U.S. cities. She writes that the city of San Francisco is

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 361.

¹³⁶ “Grounds,” 88:4, Panama Pacific International Exposition Records, BANC MSS C-A 190, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

located on “one of the loveliest sites in all the world, with bay, and strait, and ocean, blue hill and purple mountain.”¹³⁷ The exposition, for Gilman, is a vision of how U.S. cities could mirror the beauty of their natural surroundings if built with “mysterious gardens,” “frothing fountains,” and “domes and towers and minarets,” in contrast to the “dreadful gridiron pattern of our cities, the everlasting corners and straight lines, the absence of cheerful colors.”¹³⁸ She proclaims the PPIE a “Western Wonderland” that will be a testament to future generations and that her contemporaries knew “what beauty was, and were able to make it,” yet were “content with cities so dull, so foul, so sickeningly monotonous, as steadily to deprave those who could not escape from them.”¹³⁹ Gilman thus suggests that the civic dis-ease within the U.S., and particularly U.S. cities, at this time might be cured by a hybrid of public health projects and city beautification efforts of the sort exemplified in Herland and implemented in Panama and San Francisco.

Biofuturity at the Panama Pacific International Exposition

In 1903, with the signing and ratification of the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty, Panama seceded from Colombia, and the U.S. acquired oversight of the Canal Zone from the French. Frank M. Todd, the official PPIE historian, suggests that the construction of a canal was almost inevitable, a new incarnation of manifest destiny: “From the earliest history of the Isthmus it has seemed necessary to correct the oversight of nature in

¹³⁷ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Gorgeous Exposition,” *The Forerunner* 6 (1915), p. 121. Gilman probably visited the fair in March or April of 1915. At this point, only the first three or four chapters of *Herland* would have been serialized.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

omitting to provide a channel into the Pacific.”¹⁴⁰ The French began construction on the canal in 1883, only to cease six years later as a result of environmental difficulties and health risks. The U.S. picked up where the French left off in 1904, prompted in part by the Spanish-American War. As Todd recounts, “San Francisco played a conspicuous part in the drama that led up to the building of the Panama Canal, for at a leading shipyard of this city the battleship ‘Oregon’ was built.”¹⁴¹ According to Todd, when war erupted between the U.S. and Spain, the Oregon was sent to Cuba to join the Atlantic fleet. The 14,000-mile journey lasted for more than two months and “made the Isthmus of Panama look like a geographical nuisance that no virile people could tolerate.”¹⁴² In writing the history of the fair, Todd reiterates this rhetoric of health and virility that links the rehabilitation of national health to imperialist conflicts.

President Roosevelt ratified the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty on February 25, 1904, which formally guaranteed Panama’s independence by the U.S. in exchange for the “use, occupation, and control” of the Canal Zone in perpetuity by the U.S., as well as of any other lands and waters—including specifically the islands in the Panama Bay—necessary for the “construction, maintenance, operation, sanitation, and protection of the Canal.”¹⁴³ U.S. property in the Canal Zone was exempted from taxation by Panama, and the zone as well as the cities of Panama and Colon were open to U.S. military force “if necessary to preserve order there and enforce sanitary regulations.”¹⁴⁴ The resumption of construction on the canal by the U.S. led to an influx of American, European, and West Indian laborers

¹⁴⁰ Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, vol. 1, p. 7.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

in the Canal Zone, creating what Alexandra Minna Stern called a “laboratory of U.S. colonialism....Interlaced with militaristic and moralistic surveillance were rigorously implemented measures of disease and prophylaxis that tracked the movement of all living organisms—humans, insects, and rodents.”¹⁴⁵ According to Todd, “the Isthmus had the evil name of being the most fatally unhealthful part of the tropics....It was often declared that white men could not live there and that sickness alone would make the construction of the canal impossible.”¹⁴⁶ Disease eradication efforts included compulsory vaccination against smallpox. In 1904, Colonel William C. Gorgas, who had eliminated yellow fever from Cuba, spearheaded the program to wipe out yellow fever in the Canal Zone. Gorgas “initiated drainage projects, conducted house to house inspections and fumigation, constructed mosquito coverings and netting, applied kerosene, sulfur, and alcohol to kill mosquitoes and larvae, and cleared and lined ditches and water channels.”¹⁴⁷ Like S. Weir Mitchell, Todd attaches a moral dimension to illness in his history; in comparing yellow fever and malaria, he notes that while “Yellow Jack” was responsible for fewer deaths than malaria, it inflicted incomparable moral damage: “In an epidemic all but the bravest were either seized with panic and took sudden departure, or gave themselves up to a fatalistic apathy subversive of discipline and destructive of team-work.”¹⁴⁸ However, by May 1905, the U.S. eliminated the last case of yellow fever in the territory it controlled. The transformation of Panama became a testament to the effectiveness of American colonial strategy, as the uncontainable environment was understood as the

¹⁴⁵ Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 21.

¹⁴⁶ Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, vol. 1, p. 25.

¹⁴⁷ Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, p. 40.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

reason for the French government's defeat in the region. U.S. colonial sanitation projects in Panama were thus viewed as enabling both the completion of the canal and the readying of the region for the settlement of white bodies. In this context, Van's exclamation that Herland is "like an exposition," without smoke, dirt, or noise—"everything was beauty, order, perfect cleanness"—seems to be a direct reference not only to the PPIE but to these modernizing projects in colonial settings such as Panama as well as in domestic cities such as the San Francisco, newly rebuilt after the 1906 earthquake and subsequent fire.

The kickoff of construction on the canal inaugurated competition among western cities for hosting an exhibition to celebrate the project's completion. Despite San Francisco's reputation at the turn of the century as a hedonistic port city overrun with vice industries, it was selected as the site of the fair. The San Francisco elite seized on the fair as an opportunity to rebuild both the city itself and its reputation in the wake of the city's destruction by an earthquake and subsequent fire in 1906. In his February 1914 address, Charles C. Moore, president of the PPIE, declared to the 700,000 Booster Club of Los Angeles that the Expo marked the "first time in the history of the world that all the nations have been invited to come together in friendly rivalry and intercourse in the great Pacific area."¹⁴⁹ Moore might here be seen as inaugurating a shift in the discursive landscape that anticipates the regionalization of the Pacific rim; no longer a contested, outlaw arena at the edge of empire, he presents California as a portal to the future of

¹⁴⁹ PPIE Records, BANC MSS C-A 190, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 86:10, p. 2. According to Robert W. Rydell, Moore, an engineer, was president of one of the largest hydroelectrical engineering firms and director of several banks and railroads. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

economic, political, and cultural intercourse between the U.S. and the nations bordering the Pacific.¹⁵⁰ As Todd asserts in his history, the canal gave “San Francisco a new position on the planet” by making it a “necessity of navigation,” and in this way, as well as by shortening the distances from New York to major Asian ports such as Yokohama and Shanghai, the canal gave the U.S. a competitive military and economic advantage over Europe.¹⁵¹ This new position for San Francisco is echoed, not surprisingly, throughout the fair’s publicity materials. For example, in the *Standard Guide to San Francisco, with Description of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition*, the city is described as “the great gateway opening toward the newly awakened Orient, as well as ‘the playground of America’” that “will help to establish new trade routes and to colonize with desirable citizens,” thereby directly linking the PPIE with U.S. expansionism through trade, tourism, and militarism.¹⁵² Fair promotional material also dubbed the city “the last word, architecturally, among the nation’s great cities,” and proclaimed that “the new city, completely rebuilt, will itself be an attractive exhibit.”¹⁵³

Reconstructing San Francisco included the eradication of its image as a disease-ridden port city. When the bubonic plague was again discovered in San Francisco in 1907, the mayor founded the Citizen’s Health Committee, which organized the extermination of more than a million rats between 1908 and 1909. This campaign was

¹⁵⁰ “The Pacific area comprises a field of unlimited possibilities and resources, embracing the twelve nations forming the Western coast of South and Central America, Australasia, Japan and China, Russian Asia, Alaska and Western Canada, as well as the extremely rich and rapidly growing Pacific slope of the United States.” Letter from R.B. Hale dated 11/24/1913, 86:12, Panama Pacific International Exposition Records, BANC MSS C-A 190, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

¹⁵¹ Todd, Vol. 1., p. 31.

¹⁵² *Standard Guide to San Francisco, with Description of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition*. Compiled and Published by North American Press Association, Hearst Building, San Francisco, 1913.

¹⁵³ *California Welcomes the World*, PPIE Records, BANC MSS C-A 190, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 88:14.

part of the effort to “clean up” the city by restoring health and order. Plague and other diseases such as hookworm and yellow fever were persistently perceived as a side effect of the “tropicalization of the United States,” that is, as a result of increased immigration. In San Francisco in particular, as Nayan Shah argues, “health authorities readily conflated the physical condition of Chinatown with the characteristics of Chinese people. They depicted Chinese immigrants as a filthy and diseased ‘race’ who incubated such incurable afflictions as smallpox, syphilis, and bubonic plague and infected white Americans.”¹⁵⁴ The purging of disease in San Francisco was modeled on the similar project in Panama, which eradicated air- and waterborne diseases in order to make colonial outposts more inhabitable to white Americans. As Stern argues, “Tropical medicine...was deeply connected to the production of colonial and racial difference.”¹⁵⁵ As such, part of efforts to sanitize the city involved the policing of non-normative, non-white bodies.

Yet as Shah demonstrates, in the first half of the twentieth century, a gradual transition occurred in public health discourse, from the elision of disease and racial difference to a perception of Chinese Americans as citizens in need—and deserving—of public health services. This transition was already in motion in 1906; although the destruction of Chinatown was celebrated in the white press as the purification of the city, and public officials attempted to relocate Chinatown to the outskirts of the city during reconstruction, both Chinese merchants and white property owners opposed the relocation. According to Shah, the rebuilding of Chinatown was an affirmation of the

¹⁵⁴ Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 2.

¹⁵⁵ Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, p. 47.

property rights of white landlords, who charged high rents to Chinese tenants.¹⁵⁶ The rebuilding of Chinatown transformed the neighborhood into a safe and sanitary tourist attraction; that is, by widening streets and eliminating blind alleys, Chinatown became easier to “police.”¹⁵⁷ It was also promoted as the most “fascinating” attraction in San Francisco:

Chinatown is a bit of Oriental life transplanted to America. All the exotic color which made Chinatown famous before the fire of 1906 still exists. After the fire no section of the city was built up more rapidly than Chinatown, though the rebuilding required the investment of many millions. The structures are modern American, but their balconies, balustrades and pagoda-like roofs preserve the striking features of Chinese architecture.¹⁵⁸

Not only did Chinatown acquire a new status in the aftermath of the earthquake and fire, but so did its inhabitants. Chinese Americans were celebrated in the fair’s promotional material as “among the city’s most patriotic citizens.”¹⁵⁹ As Shah’s work reveals, race, citizenship, and public health shaped the terrain of incorporation of Chinese immigrants as citizen-subjects, a process that “distinguishes Chinese American citizen-subjects from both internal and external aliens and but also emphasizes their perpetual difference from ‘true’ white Americans.”¹⁶⁰

Sanitizing bodies and spaces was also central to the fair’s exhibits, which included displays on colonial education and disease eradication, a race betterment booth, and as previously discussed, a baby incubator showcase. The fair’s Palace of Education

¹⁵⁶ Shah, *Contagious Divides*.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Standard Guide to San Francisco, with Description of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, 1913.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Shah, p. 16.

included an exhibit on colonial education in the Philippines, the largest exhibit in the palace. According to Todd, the exhibit instructed visitors on how the U.S. had “elevated” life in the Philippines.¹⁶¹ The school curriculum “embraced industrial work as well as academic training and physical culture”; students were taught to use local natural resources to manufacture items such as baskets, hats, laces, and textiles and were also given marketing training, such that “advanced pupils, after graduation, went into the rural districts as agents, collecting the finished articles and encouraging the students to do home work. Thus, in short, the schools developed commerce instead of following it.”¹⁶² The exhibit detailed the changes the U.S. implemented to education in the Philippines, such as increasing attendance to include not just the “rich and powerful”; girls were allowed to attend, and the official language of the schools shifted from Spanish to English. As Todd recounts, “The object was a system adapted to the needs of the Philippine people,” which the U.S. determined was a five-phase system that advanced students from “literate workers,” to “efficient worker and citizen,” to “trained craftsman...socially fit to be a local leader,” to “the professional man,” and finally to a national leader.¹⁶³ The exhibit also linked education with public health by including a display by the Philippine Public Health Service on U.S. improvements in reducing tropical disease. According to Todd, the exhibit showed “models of old houses and streets in Manila...side by side with models of modern houses and equipment; sanitary toilets, and wells; and copies of bulletins issued to the people telling them how wells

¹⁶¹ Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, vol. 4, p. 49.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

ought to be protected and how to dispose of their sewage.”¹⁶⁴ Yet, after signing the Treaty of Paris with Spain on December 10, 1898, the U.S.’s four-year war with the Philippines devastated the islands’ education and public health infrastructure. Warwick Anderson observes, “As Americans assumed control they found little evidence of previous scientific and medical endeavor and felt justified in representing the Spanish period as a time of unrelieved apathy, ignorance, and superstition, in contrast to their own self-proclaimed modernity, progressivism, and scientific zeal.”¹⁶⁵ This perceived lack of infrastructure further justified the U.S.’s continued intervention in the archipelago while deferring the transformation from colonial subjugation to self-government and citizenship. The five-phase educational system on display at the PPIE is a quintessential example of this perpetual suspension of sovereignty, in that colonial subjects cannot attain the full rights of citizenship until being deemed properly reformed by the very agents of their subjugation.

The race betterment exhibit was also a key feature of the fair.¹⁶⁶ It contained “large plaster casts of Atlas, and Venus, and of Apollo, . . . to advertise the human race at its best, and get that race interested in its glorious past and possible future.”¹⁶⁷ The booth also featured live exhibits, four people who sat in vibrating chairs and “looked resentful of the past and careless of the future, and as though they thoroughly needed the good shaking they were getting.”¹⁶⁸ On the walls of the exhibit were images of the organizers

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 59.

¹⁶⁵ Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies*, p. 22.

¹⁶⁶ Described by Frank M. Todd as “one of the exhibits that caught the eye of every visitor.” *The Story of the Exposition*, vol. 4, p. 38.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. “Mechanical stimulation” was a popular medical procedure to cure many ailments, and may have

of the first Race Betterment Conference, held in January of 1914 in Battlecreek, Michigan. The purpose of the exhibit was “to present the evidence of race deterioration, to show the possibility of race improvement, to emphasize the importance of personal hygiene and race hygiene, or eugenics, as methods of race improvement.”¹⁶⁹ It aimed to “create a new and superior race through eugenics, or personal and public hygiene, and eugenics, or racial hygiene.”¹⁷⁰ Robert W. Rydell marks this exhibit as a moment of entry for eugenicists into exhibition culture. He argues that by the turn of the century, world fairs had become “one of the most effective vehicles for transmitting ideas of scientific racism from intellectual elites to millions of ordinary Americans.”¹⁷¹ In fact, the exhibit was the central feature of the Race Betterment Foundation’s participation in the PPIE, which included holding its Second National Conference on Race Betterment at the fair, during the so-called race betterment week. The conference sessions, which attracted between 1,200 and 1,500 people daily, with total attendance reaching 10,000, featured talks by the founder of the Race Betterment Foundation, John H. Kellogg, who announced his plan to create a “eugenic registry” with the intention of establishing an “aristocracy of health”; other presentation topics included the health dangers of intermarriage.¹⁷² The week culminated with a “morality masque” titled “Redemption: A Masque of Race Betterment,” which included a cast of more than 200 students from the

been employed here to stand for the revitalization of the race.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁷¹ Robert W. Rydell, *World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Expositions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 39. According to Rydell, eugenicists’ participation in “exposition culture” included the exhibits that accompanied the Second and Third International Eugenic Congresses at the American Museum of Natural History in 1921 and 1932, respectively; the fitter family contests at fairs in Kansas, Texas, Georgia, Michigan, Massachusetts, Arkansas, and Oklahoma; and the “typical American family” display at the 1940 New York World’s Fair.

¹⁷² Rydell, *World of Fairs; All the World’s a Fair*.

University of California, Berkeley, and was performed to an audience of 5,000 at the Oakland Auditorium.¹⁷³ The masque narrated the redemption of humanity after “Fortunate,” a character who had received a careful upbringing from his family, is killed in war. The story eerily recalls Gilman’s *Herland*: humankind calls on “science, faith, and enlightenment” to end war and begin “a new race upon the solid foundation of physical perfection and mental enlightenment.”¹⁷⁴ Eugenics, then, or the eugenic body, was as central to the fair as it was to Gilman’s novel, and its apparent popularity among fairgoers suggests a growing public interest in eugenics.

Imperial Simulacra

*The territory no longer preceded the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—precession of simulacra—that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours. The desert of the real itself.*¹⁷⁵

Nowhere at the PPIE was the slippery slope between the real and the imaginary more apparent than in the Joy Zone. This carnival section, located on the outskirts of the fair, laid bare the imperial unconscious of the expo. It transformed colonial subjects into living specimens relegated to ghettoized “native villages” for the amusement of American

¹⁷³ Rydell notes that the masque was so successful, it was made available to social clubs across the nation; *World of Fairs*, p. 42.

¹⁷⁴ As cited in Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, p. 224.

¹⁷⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 1.

fairgoers, offering them a means to visit the outposts of U.S. imperialism without foregoing their domestic comforts. The Zone invited fairgoers to enjoy themselves in a range of “exotic” locals, including Hawaiian, Samoan, Somali, Hopi, Australasian, and Tehuantepec Villages; a Chinese Pagoda and Village; as well as replicas of the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone Park, and the Panama Canal itself. These simulacra of U.S. imperialism functioned as a way for fair-going Americans to consume U.S imperialism, and yet the marketing of empire to the American public had to remain in flux—to undergo what Todd refers to as “some queer transitions”—to continue to capture visitors’ attention and dollars.¹⁷⁶ As Todd laments, the Zone was confronted with more sophisticated crowds than at past fairs, which made it more difficult to attract fairgoers:

This was the first great exposition that had been held since three important developments in human endeavor had become commonplaces of life: the automobile, moving pictures, and the aeroplane. How far these affected the popular taste unconsciously is conjectural, but they must have had a great deal to do with the way people reacted to efforts to entertain them. There was a time when great crowds could be attracted and held by stereopticons, but it was so no longer. It was an age of sophisticated children. Things had become commonplace that once were wonderful. The public imagination had been ‘speeded up,’ and to outrun it, things must be swift.¹⁷⁷

Zone attractions then were victims of modernity’s commodification of the public imagination. Under constant pressure to turn a profit, those exhibits that did not perform well financially were transformed into more marketable exhibits, while the subjects of the exhibits were treated as expendable and superfluous.

“Somali Land” is perhaps the most amazing example of the commodification of

¹⁷⁶ Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, vol. 2, p. 350.

¹⁷⁷ Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, vol. 2, p. 373

empire. Todd describes the exhibit as a “community of thin, black, and hollow-cheeked wanderers...who did a great deal of violent, flat-foot dancing and spear shaking on their ballyhoo stand but failed to commit any acts of cannibalism inside, so they lost their popularity and did no business of great volume.”¹⁷⁸ Todd’s description of the Somalis reinforces what Stuart Hall calls a “racialized regime of representation,” drawing on cultural myths and stereotypes about Africans as savage cannibals. Yet it also calls attention to consumer desire to witness these mythologies embodied and reproduced as a commodified spectacle. Because of the low volume of business, the Somalis were “invited” to leave by the assistant director of the Zone Division, Bryan. When they refused to leave, Bryan notified Immigration officials, who “took a platoon of Guards to the compound, loaded the dark strangers on a Fadgl train, and escorted them to the Yacht Harbor, where a Government tug awaited them for Angel Island, whence they were in due time and regular form deported.”¹⁷⁹ The Somali village was then transformed into a “(bloodless) Spanish bull fight.” Other “native villages” that drew on racial caricature and narratives of racial progress to entertain fairgoers included the “Australasians,” whose village, according to Todd, offered “an entertaining and instructive picture of antipodean life in the primitive, but their support was not encouraging to a longer stay.” Likewise, the Samoans, although “more popular” according to Todd, departed in September, “because if they missed that sailing they would have had to stay until the

¹⁷⁸ Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, vol. 2, p. 375.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. A Fadgl Auto Train was a trackless transportation system used at the exposition grounds. The trains consisted of an automobile tractor and three trailers that seated 1200 passengers. I imagine they are similar to the trams currently used at amusement parks like Disneyland.

gates closed, and things were bad enough with them open.”¹⁸⁰ The Australasians and Samoans, like the Somali, were hastily expelled from the imperial center once their profitability waned. Todd’s description of the forced removal of these racialized subjects of empire reveals the Panama Canal as a structuring system of representing the U.S.’s control over the movement of bodies and commodities.

Other imperial simulacra within the Zone included the Hawaiian Village, which competed with the less sensationalized exhibits in the Hawaiian Pavilion, as well as the pineapple booth of the Palace of Horticulture, where “large crowds were entertained and delighted by the Hawaiian music.”¹⁸¹ According to Todd, the Hawaiian Commissioner objected to the name of the Zone attraction “because it did not reflect the actual life of such a community, so the name was changed to ‘Hula Dancers.’”¹⁸² The Chinese Village contained what Todd calls a “sort of chamber of horrors known at first as ‘Underground Chinatown,’ in which visitors received awful visual warnings of the fate of the opium smoker and the drug fiend. It failed to show very much Chinese life.”¹⁸³ The Chinese Commissioner-General objected to the name “Underground Chinatown,” and so the Chinese characters were removed and the name was changed to “Underground Slumming.”¹⁸⁴ However, it continued to operate in the midst of the Chinese Village, perpetuating stereotypes about the illicit amusements to be found in Chinatown. The official Chinese Pavilion at the fair—referred to as the Forbidden City—presented a very different image of Chinese culture. The buildings were sent prefabricated from the new

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ See Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, vol. 2, p. 352.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, vol. 2, p. 358.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

Chinese republic to the fair, where they were assembled by Chinese laborers who were lauded by Todd as effective and efficient workers. The official Chinese exhibits also celebrated the Chinese as willing workers and China as “ripe for American investment.”¹⁸⁵ The contrast between the official exhibits and the Joy Zone displays reveals the conflict in how racial and ethnic identity was represented at the fair. The objections of the Chinese and Hawaiian Commissioners suggest the possibility for contesting racist representations of non-Europeans and colonial subjects. However, ultimately, the exhibits, even Todd’s lauding of the Chinese as good workers, reinforce simplistic depictions of racial and ethnic difference in the service of the hegemonic vision of the body.

The Tehuantepec Village perhaps was the most striking example of the fusion of ethnology with mass culture and consumerism. Todd declares the village to be one of the most beloved features of the Zone. “It was bright and cheerful. Its ‘front’ was a duly extravagant presentment of greed-eyed and highly colored Aztec gods—or what might have passed for them with people unacquainted with any Aztec gods—and was gay with paintings of tropical scenery.”¹⁸⁶ He suggests here that accuracy of representation is insignificant, as most fairgoers are “unacquainted” with indigenous Mexican culture. The village had been assembled and transported to San Francisco by Captain A.W. Lewis, who had staged a military drama, the Boer War, at the St. Louis Exposition. Captain Lewis made several trips to Mexico to procure cultural artifacts for the Tehuantepec Village, which he transported “on pack mules over rough mountain trails and through the

¹⁸⁵ Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, p. 229.

¹⁸⁶ Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, vol. 2, p. 355.

lines of hostile armies.”¹⁸⁷ According to Todd, “the desire of Mexicans of all the then warring factions to assist in the representation of their country at the great Exposition made such transport possible. The result was the establishment at San Francisco of a selected and concentrated representation of Mexican life such as one would have to travel hundreds of miles in Mexico to see.”¹⁸⁸ It is in this sense a simulacra, as the exhibit has “artificially resurrected under the auspices of the real” indigenous culture.¹⁸⁹ The Village consisted of a patio, which opened to a theater; the patio contained a fountain, and “all about artisans were working at characteristic handicrafts. Behind the theater was an “exotic garden,” where more artisans labored, as well as a reproduction of Lake Xomiecho. The artisans were dressed in costume and depicted the “arts and industries of the Aztecs, Mitlas, and Tooltecs as well as of modern Mexicans.”¹⁹⁰ Fairgoers could purchase souvenir handicrafts or “wander peacefully and unsolicited through the little tropical garden, for the proprietor insisted on the comfortable regulation that no one was to be asked to buy anything. At the restaurant you could get Mexican dishes cooked by people that knew what a *tortilla* ought to be.”¹⁹¹ Todd also praises the orchestra, singers, and fandango dancers. However, the Village seems to not have been a financial success, in part, according to Todd, because of its investment in transportation and its “obligation to return these people to their homes.”¹⁹² The fair, then, was a space for showcasing representations of cultural difference figured through the body and physical difference.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 8.

¹⁹⁰ Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, vol. 2, p. 355.

¹⁹¹ Todd, *The Story of the Exposition*, vol. 2, p. 356.

¹⁹² Ibid.

Unlike Gilman's vision of eugenic imperialism in which she transforms colonial subjects into white women, the fair allows us to glimpse the realities of U.S. empire—the subjugation and exploitation of colonial and non-European subjects—as a result of both racist representational practices and economic and political systems of domination.

Conclusion

Gilman was among the many visitors to the Zone, and she too experienced the imperial simulacra of the attractions exhibited there. In “The Gorgeous Exhibition,” she writes about her visit to the Zone and about the model Panama Canal in particular, as follows.

It is a wonder of relief-map work and marvelous mechanics. The visitors sit on a revolving platform, which slowly moves around the section of Panama spread before them. There are the white lines of the Canal Zone, showing plainly the towns and all the great engineering works, the marking posts and towers, the railroad, the great dams and locks. There is real water, a real train running on the tracks, and little ships that move mysteriously before one's eyes, enter the locks, and are lifted on their way apparently under their own steam. While the eyes sees [*sic*], the ear is instructed. Before each seat is a telephone connection fitting both ears at once, and each passenger hears, from one of the many phonographs, the description of that part of the scene which is immediately before him. Could scientific ingenuity farther go?¹⁹³

The canal model gives Gilman the sensation of sailing through the canal from her beloved San Francisco. Like the other attractions on the Zone, it brings the empire home to the U.S., in a sense eliding the spatial distance between the U.S. and its imperial territories. Borrowing from Amy Kaplan, I have attempted to demonstrate here how Gilman's novel reveals that “United States nation building and empire building [are]

¹⁹³ Gilman, “The Gorgeous Exposition,” p. 121.

historically coterminous and mutually defining,” and how this process reveals itself in the cultural production of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.¹⁹⁴ I would add to Kaplan’s formulation that central to this process of defining nation and empire is the body and its figuration as normative and deviant, healthy and degenerate, determined according to its position as citizen or colonial subject, native born or immigrant, white or black, and so forth.

Gilman’s work is an important example of how biofuturity might be understood as emerging from nativist anxieties over the deterioration of a cohesive national culture, perceived as a result of immigration and emancipation, and manifesting in the imagined degeneration of white bodies. Gilman harnessed this anxiety to construct a future vision in which individual bodies—and by extension, the national body—could be improved. Her vision was influenced by colonial projects and eugenic science, which converged on the world stage most conspicuously during the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, and on her page in her novel, *Herland*.

¹⁹⁴ Kaplan, “Left Alone,” p. 17

“Hysterical Reconstructions:

‘Curing’ Racial Ambiguity and Reimagining the Black Family”

“Only the Black woman can say ‘when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me.’”

Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice From the South*, 1892

“The hysterical symptom arises as a compromise between two opposing affects or instinctual trends, of which one is attempting to express a partial impulse or component of the sexual constitution, while the other tries to suppress it.”

Sigmund Freud, “General Remarks on Hysterical Attacks,” 1909

“Physicians make good husbands and this is in part due to the fact that their knowledge of the difficulties of feminine life causes them to be more thoughtfully tender and more charitable as concerns the effects upon women of certain inevitable conditions as to which the layman is ignorant or indifferent.”

Silas Weir Mitchell, *Doctor and Patient*, 1887

Perhaps the most well-known case of hysteria, Freud’s 1905 case history of Dora highlights the ambiguity of the hysteric’s position in the nineteenth century white, bourgeois family. As Freud’s study of Dora suggests, the hysterical woman posed a challenge to the normative family structure, while at the same time she was unconditionally bound to it.¹ The characteristics of hysteria, such as nervousness, dependency, fragility, and emotionality, were in many ways an exaggeration of nineteenth-century gender norms, which made illness central to femininity by defining

¹ Dora is a pseudonym given by Freud to a patient he treated in 1900 and discussed in the work titled “A Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria,” published in 1905. Freud is treating “Dora” for hysteria, which he links to bisexual desire. Dora, however, objects that her father is offering her sexually to his friend in exchange for the friend’s wife, with whom he is having an affair. See Sigmund Freud, *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, Philip Rieff, intro. (New York: Touchstone, 1997); Jane Gallop, *The Daughter’s Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982).

women as weaker and more susceptible to disease. By the end of the nineteenth century, hysteria became essential to the construction of dominant ideologies of white womanhood by both normalizing physical disability as a condition of middle-class, white womanhood—in the sense that a “delicate constitution” signified both racial and class position—and calling into question the mental ability of women, so that white womanhood was ideologically characterized by feeble-mindedness and physical degeneracy. The ambiguity of hysteria, then, is that while it exacerbated the “symptoms” of femininity such that in their illness women became increasingly confined to the home, it also rendered them less able to perform the reproductive and domestic duties representative of their social position, thereby posing a threat to patriarchal sexual and familial relations.²

Representations of hysteria also developed as a rich literary convention important in post-Reconstruction Era fiction by African American writers, specifically Frances E. W. Harper’s *Iola Leroy*, Pauline Hopkins’ *Of One Blood*, and Charles Chesnut’s *The Marrow of Tradition*.³ By representing black women—or more specifically, biracial women—as susceptible to the diseases of “overcivilization,” African American writers challenged the dominant construction of black womanhood

² Carol Smith-Rosenberg argues that hysteria was a sort of exit strategy for women from gender-role conflict in that “it purchased her escape from the emotional and—frequently—sexual demands of her life only at the cost of pain, disability, and an intensification of women’s traditional passivity and dependence,” p. 207. Carol Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1985).

³ In Chesnut’s novel, the hysteria is actually, experienced by a white woman at the sight of her biracial half-sister; however, this hysteria is ultimately about family genealogy and is in effect “cured” by a black physician. Frances E. W. Harper’s *Iola Leroy; or Shadows Uplifted* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Pauline Hopkins’ *Of One Blood* in *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins* (New York: Oxford Universities Press, 1988); and Charles Chesnut’s *The Marrow of Tradition* (New York: Dover Thrift Edition, 2003).

as sexually available, reconstructing an image of black women that tended to underscore their roles as wives and mothers. In fact, I argue in this chapter that part of the project of crafting a national semiology of the black middle-class after the failure of Reconstruction involved invoking middle-class illnesses, such as hysteria, previously associated with whiteness. I contend that a stratification in the class and racial coding of disease began to occur with the rise of the black middle class. Whites upheld the increase in insanity and tuberculosis among freed men and women as proof that civilization was an unnatural state for African Americans. African American writers such as Harper and Hopkins restructured that logic such that, with emancipation, white, middle-class nervous illnesses such as hysteria became a means to represent and distinguish the black middle class, and to counter previous medical-eugenic rhetoric that insisted on the inferiority and degeneracy of black bodies.⁴ White authors' representations of nervous disorders such as hysteria, for instance Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," emphasized the degenerative threat these illnesses—and their purported treatments—posed to both women's bodies and middle-class families. However, by representing hysteria in biracial women, African American writers such as Harper and Hopkins employed illness as a corporeal manifestation of class through which they assert a claim for black women's bourgeois social, moral, and sexual respectability. By doing so, they also established the "undisputed dignity of [their] womanhood"—to draw on the passage by Anna Julia

⁴ Katherine Ott argues that "whites urged African-Americans to adopt white ways, and, by implication, white diseases, as proof that they could handle freedom. The result was that whites located black illness in blackness, and blackness remained a deviancy from white norms," p. 103. Katherine Ott, *Fevered Lives: Tuberculosis in American Culture Since 1870* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

Cooper with which I began this chapter—and their power to determine “when and where” they enter into the larger, national articulation of both gender and race.

Both Harper’s *Iola Leroy* and Hopkins’ *Of One Blood* employ the trope of the “hysterical mulatta,” in part as an assertion of black women’s middle-class sensibilities.⁵ Yet Harper and Hopkins also use this figure to challenge the tragic end that has traditionally been the fate of biracial characters, as well as to negotiate biracial subjectivity. The term “mulatto” in its popular usage generally signified a person of mixed race, specifically someone half white and half black with “full-blooded” parents of different races. However, with the rigid enforcement of “one-drop” racial laws, the term had come to represent various combinations of mixed-race people, even those whose blackness did not conform to the visual system of racial difference.⁶ In the aftermath of the failure of Reconstruction, a moment when social contact between white and black people had been severely prohibited by Jim Crow segregation, the mulatto had become a common literary trope to explore interracial relationships, and in particular the legacy of miscegenation resulting from the rape of black slave women by their white masters.⁷ Female biracial characters were most often employed in the

⁵ The category “mulatto” first appeared in the census in 1850. Martha Hodes, “Fractions and Fictions in the U.S. Census of 1890,” in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). In 1860, 13 to 20 percent of the African American population had white ancestry, and the free black population was predominantly biracial. Judith R. Berzon, *Neither White nor Black: The Mulatto Character in American Fiction* (New York: New York University Press, 1978), p. 11.

⁶ Shawn Michelle Smith argues that “the very narrow color line drawn by ‘one drop’ of blood laws, which legally marked individuals with one-thirty-second part African American ancestry as ‘black,’ created objects of racial knowledge that could not be discerned by an epistemological paradigm rooted in visual evidence,” p. 189. Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

⁷ Hazel Carby argues, “The mulatta figure was a recognition of the difference between and separateness of the two races at the same time as it was a product of a sexual relationship between white and black,” p. 90. Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American*

literature of this period as “tragic mulattas” as a means to negotiate national anxiety over racial amalgamation. “Tragic mulattas” typically appear white, and in fact often do not know they are of mixed race.⁸ The narrative tension in these storylines—what Susan Gillman calls “the race melodrama”—most typically revolves around the characters’ discovery of their secret parentage and the usually fatal consequences.⁹ Yet in *Iola Leroy* and *Of One Blood*, I argue, the hysterical manifestation of these consequences marks a shift in the literary trope from the tragic mulatta of abolitionist literature to the hysterical mulatta of the modern clinic.¹⁰ Through the relentless scrutiny of black bodies for signs of degeneracy and illness, “invisibly” biracial characters suggest the fallibility of racial science predicated on the clear legibility of race. The figure of the mulatta, then, calls into question both the stability of the color line and the ability to codify and verify race.

The “hysterical mulatta” protagonists I analyze here, Iola, Iola’s mother Marie, and Dianthe, all experience repressed racial subjectivities. In *Iola Leroy*, Iola’s parents have kept her African American identity secret from her, while her mother

Woman Novelist (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁸ In my analysis of the “hysterical mulatta,” I include female characters who are biracial and who would have been defined at the time as non-white, following the social and political practices of the period. For a more detailed analysis of the “tragic mulatto/a,” see Berzon, *Neither White nor Black: The Mulatto Character in American Fiction*.

⁹ Gillman argues that the American race melodrama emerged in conjunction with the institutionalization of anti-black repression. Susan Gillman, “The Mulatto: Tragic or Triumphant? The Nineteenth-Century American Race Melodrama,” in *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, ed. Shirley Samuels (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

¹⁰ I borrow and expand on Michele Birnbaum’s term. Birnbaum argues, “The sentimental angst of her ‘condition’ is scrutinized, diagnosed, and finally cured by marrying the doctor treating her. Thus, monitored simultaneously by medical and marital institutions, race loyalties and desires represented as warring within, the mulatta proves the means to control the race wars without,” p. 10. Michele Birnbaum, *Race, Work, and Desire in American Literature: 1860-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Marie also “passes” for white. In *Of One Blood*, Dianthe loses her memory and the two men in love with her conspire to suppress her African American identity.

Hysterical symptoms become manifest in these characters as a result of the emergence of their “double consciousness,” what Freud refers to as “two opposing affects” in the passage from “General Remarks on Hysterical Attacks” I quote at the beginning of this chapter.¹¹ For instance, in *Iola Leroy*, when Iola learns she has black ancestry, she erupts in “hysterical laughter.” In *Of One Blood*, Dianthe’s hysterical amnesia culminates in her repressed black identity, which emerges as a second, shadow voice while she sings. Thus, although Freud insists that the locus of this internal conflict is sexual desire, I posit that in these texts, it is provoked by racial identity.

The presence of hysteria in the characters under study here counters dominant notions of “hybrid degeneracy” that suggested biracial people were sterile or less fertile; had more physical, mental, and emotional disabilities; and had a greater propensity toward criminality.¹² In their novels, Harper, Hopkins, and Chestnutt challenge these dominant constructions of racial amalgamation as a medical disorder, and suggest that it is rather the lack of knowledge or acknowledgement of their

¹¹ W.E.B. Du Bois’s notion of “double consciousness” is a central formulation of African American identity. He defines it as “this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of the other.... One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body,” p. 11. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Terri Hume Oliver, eds. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999). As scholars such as Cynthia Schrager suggest, Du Bois’s was also influenced by William James’s work on the unconscious. In the late nineteenth century, “double consciousness” was a popular term for multiple personality. Cynthia D. Schrager, “Pauline Hopkins and William James: The New Psychology and the Politics of Race,” in *The Unruly Voice: Rediscovering Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins*, ed. John Cullen Gruesser (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996).

¹² So-called hybrid degeneracy emerged from the polygenic school of nineteenth century racial science, which included scientists such as Samuel George Morton and Josiah C. Nott, who argued that racial difference represented the multiple genetic origins of the human species. An alternative theory, “hybrid vigor,” imagined mixed blood as a superior biological trait and thus an important catalyst of racial progress and improvement through assimilation.

mixed—often violently—family histories that triggers physical and mental illness. In all three of these novels, then, hysteria comes to represent a return of the repressed legacy of sexual violence under slavery by making visible the obscured history of the institutionalized rape of black women, and the subsequent disruption and separation of black families. For Harper, Hopkins, and Chestnutt, reconstructing dispersed black families and communities after emancipation serves as a means to “cure” the racial ambiguity of the biracial heroines, while the heroine’s illness underscores the danger of suppressing the amalgamated genealogies of white and black families.

In *Iola Leroy* and *Of One Blood*, this cure is also accomplished through what Ann duCille calls “the coupling convention,” specifically through the heroines’ marriages to black doctors. As duCille argues, turn-of-the-century African American authors employ the coupling convention to subvert the dominant construct of black womanhood as hypersexual and promiscuous and to demand equal treatment for black women as that received by white women.¹³ In Harper and Hopkins’ novels, the curing of the hysterical mulatta by a black physician is the impetus for the heroine’s fulfillment of her black identity. Specifically, Iola turns down a marriage proposal by a white physician that is conditional on her passing for white, opting instead to marry a black physician and join him in the work of racial uplift. Dianthe, on the other hand, is literally transformed from a white to a black woman, thereby undoing the incestuousness of her marriage to Reuel, the black physician who treats her. This leads me to the third passage with which I opened this chapter, S. Weir Mitchell’s

¹³ Ann duCille, *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women’s Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

assertion that doctors make good husbands because they know intimately what ails the female body. The pairing of the “hysterical mulattas” in these novels with black physicians, then, suggests that black doctors played an important role in racially determining biracial bodies. Black doctors in these novels restore black women’s bodies to health by reconstructing them as black. In this way, Hopkins and Harper engage in a deliberate project of African American self-making that reaffirms black subjectivities and black bodies as healthy in direct opposition to a dominant discourse that links blackness with disease and degeneracy.

Yet although hysteria was commonly framed as a phenomenon of white, middle-class womanhood, a manifestation in individual bodies of a shift in gendered social relations, the anxiety of the hysteric might be understood as an inscription onto the individual of a larger, national crisis. This crisis, sparked by liberation of black men and women from slavery; the influx of immigrants from Asia, Ireland, and Southern and Eastern Europe; drastic waves of migration from rural areas to urban centers; and U.S. colonial maneuvering in, for example, the Philippines, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, was manifest in violent public acts of racial hysteria, such as the lynching of black men. Whites perceived the emancipation and extension of citizenship rights to 4 million slaves as a threat to their economic, political, and social hegemony in the U.S. after the Civil War. Violent white supremacist organizations such as the Klu Klux Klan emerged in response to white anxieties over the changing social and political order in the nation. These anxieties were focused on the national body, on the specter of national amalgamation that would issue from a biracial citizenry. The myth of the black rapist served to justify drastic increases in acts of racial hysteria such as

the lynching of black men. Rather than a response to the rape of white women, however, these acts of violence were most often a reaction to attempts by African Americans to engage actively in political and social life through education, community organizations, and political participation. In this chapter, then, I analyze representations of hysteria in biracial female characters in the context of a larger, national epidemic of racial hysteria.

Hysterical women in novels such as Frances E.W. Harper's *Iola Leroy*, Charles Chestnut's *The Marrow of Tradition*, and Pauline Hopkins' *Of One Blood*, then, characterizes black women as akin to (and often *kin* to) white women, while the curing of hysteria enables the reconstruction of a black family genealogy disrupted by slavery.¹⁴ These authors employ the trope of the mulatta, who is both black and white, to forge a bond of empathy and understanding between white and black women, as a means to move white readers to both recognize the humanity of African Americans and to actively participate in struggles against racial violence.¹⁵ The fictional representations of hysteria in biracial women by Harper and Hopkins, and in the white sister of a biracial woman by Chestnut, participate in the discursive regime of biofuturity by imagining the improvement of black bodies and families paradoxically through the experience of illness. The romantic coupling of biracial women with physician-lovers stabilize the women's racial identification. In all three of these novels, the amalgamated genealogies of white and black families are resolved through

¹⁴ Social conventions of the period classified biracial women as black; I will discuss this further in a subsequent section.

¹⁵ As P. Gabrielle Foreman suggests, biracial characters serve as a rhetorical appeal to white readers for what she calls "exceptionalist consanguinity." P. Gabrielle Foreman, *Activist Sentiments: Reading Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

the curing of illness by black physicians. Ultimately, these works suggest an alternative understanding of hysteria in which female nervousness comes to define American womanhood itself vis-à-vis the culture of violent racial politics of the period.

In the pages that follow, I will discuss the emergence of a national culture of racial surveillance in response to the political integration of African American men after emancipation, specifically, the obsessive efforts to scientifically and socially demarcate and separate the boundaries between white and black bodies. I then discuss how African American uplift campaigns negotiated this eugenic obsession with the body to suggest the ubiquity of the culture of biofuturity, which I define as the impetus to imagine the future of the nation in and through the improvement of individual bodies. I focus in particular on how W.E.B. DuBois' notion of the "talented tenth" participates in the rhetoric of racial degeneracy and the culture of biofuturity of the period. I connect this project of uplift to medical definitions of hysteria in order to examine how Harper, Hopkins, and Chestnutt employ the trope of hysteria to negotiate conflicts over biracial subjectivities and interracial families in *Iola Leroy*, *Of One Blood*, and *The Marrow of Tradition*. Finally, I discuss the social and cultural authority of the black doctor in relation to the emerging black medical profession the racial disciplining of ambiguous bodies. I explore how through the possession of medical knowledge, this figure represents the possibilities for improving black bodies and uplifting black families.

Racial Definitions: An American Obsession

Until the Civil War and emancipation, slavery as a political and social identity functioned to differentiate white and black. As scholars such as Grace Elizabeth Hale suggest, prior to emancipation, slavery defined blackness, and citizen, whiteness.¹⁶ During and after the Civil War, however, “citizen” contained blackness within it. A racial dialectic emerged that supplanted the slave-citizen dichotomy, with whiteness increasingly becoming the dominant marker of social and political authority. Whiteness, defined largely according to southern cultural notions of self and other, was re-imagined as a biological category, and became a framework through which to articulate a national identity, a framework that depended on racial visibility and that materialized through control and segregation of nonwhite bodies in public spaces.¹⁷

Identifying and defining people of mixed race became an American obsession after emancipation. To justify and maintain this biologized racial dichotomy, sociologists, physicians, psychologists, and biologists scrutinized the bodies of biracial people for any sign of the effects of racial mixing. For example, in the 1890 census, the U.S. attempted for the first time to distinguish between various degrees of black ancestry by employing four categories of blackness: “black,” “mulatto,” “quadroon,” and “octoroon.”¹⁸ The proliferation of racial categories to designate people of African

¹⁶ Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), p. 4.

¹⁷ Hale further argues in *Making Whiteness* that “southern segregation made a new collective white identity across lines of gender and class and a new regional distinctiveness. Yet paradoxically, the southern whiteness that segregation created provided a cultural foundation for the very ‘natural’ racial differences white southerners had hoped to protect and a route back to the nation. Grounding the modern whiteness that in turn grounded national reconciliation, the specifically southern culture of segregation became doubly important for the nation, as racial narratives and spectacles utilized southern settings and reworked southern history and as southern blacks in growing numbers began to migrate out of the region,” p. 9.

¹⁸ Hodes, “Fractions and Fictions.”

descent coincided with the solidifying of the color line, while belying anxieties about the permeability of that line. Although these racial categories did not correspond to differences in legal status, as Martha Hodes argues in “Fractions and Fictions in the U.S. Census of 1890,” they were meant to “maintain an invincible boundary between whiteness and African ancestry for the sake of upholding white supremacy.”¹⁹ The 1890 census, then, reinforced and justified social and legal codes that prohibited miscegenation, setting a precedent for the one-drop rule that would be codified in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896.²⁰ These “official” categories of blackness imposed racial identities through which African Americans had to negotiate their relationship to the state, identities that did not account for African Americans’ self-definitions of their own racial subjectivity.²¹

Attempts to rigidly separate white and black speak to the emergent anxieties over racial degeneracy, specifically fears over race suicide as a result of the supposed contamination of white blood through miscegenation, a term coined in 1863.²² Miscegenation and the miscegenous body became the focus of civil rights and equal protection discourse in the wake of the Civil War. Specifically, the hysteria around the potential for sexual intermingling between the races, manifest in acts of violence

¹⁹ Hodes, “Fractions and Fictions,” p. 258.

²⁰ As Hodes notes, the final data compilation from the 1890 census contained a report titled *Report on the Insane, Feeble-Minded, Deaf and Dumb, and Blind* divided the category of “colored” into “black” and “mixed blood,” most likely as a way to determine the mental and physical effects of miscegenation. *Ibid.*, p. 259.

²¹ Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 231.

²² “Miscegenation” was coined by David Goodman Croly and George Wakeman in their 72-page booklet titled *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and the Negro*. See Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 248, n. 81.

such as lynching, reveals the extent to which whiteness relied on black subjugation. Saidiya Hartman suggests that miscegenation without violent sexual domination was perceived as an aberrant practice that threatened the racial purity of individual bodies and thereby the physical and moral health of the nation, while anti-miscegenation laws were one example of the state's efforts to "protect and police whiteness" by defining and containing blackness legally, civilly, and socially.²³ Although the census does not account for the possibility of intimate or family relations between white and black Americans, Hodes argues that a central priority was to determine whether black and white people were still having sex, and if so, what the physical effects were of that sexual union, specifically, the fertility and mortality of biracial offspring.²⁴ Indeed, in his 1904 census analysis, Walter Willcox, one of the first demographic statisticians in the U.S., asserts that the census actually rendered sexual intercourse and reproduction between the races unmeasurable, in effect reinforcing the racial logic of Jim Crow by making it impossible to count and thus account for moments of social and sexual intercourse between the races.²⁵

And yet, biracial people signaled the penetrability of the rigid social segregation of black and white people, evidence of sexual relations between the two races. As Lauren Berlant argues in *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, the relationship between white Americans and African Americans has been intensely sexual. Citizenship for people of color in the U.S., Berlant contends, has been

²³ Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, p. 248, n. 81.

²⁴ Hodes, "Fractions and Fictions."

²⁵ Walter F. Willcox, "Census Statistics of the Negro," in *Studies in the American Race Problem*, ed. Alfred Holt Stone, intro by Walter F. Willcox (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1908). Originally published in *Yale Review* in November 1904.

predicated on their “submission to a national sexuality that blurs the line between the disembodied entitlements of liberal citizenship and the places where bodies experience the sensation of being dominated.”²⁶ In the post-Reconstruction U.S. moment of *de jure* segregation under study here, African American recognition as national subjects, according to Berlant, requires a “release from sensuality.”²⁷ Indeed, black uplift movements of this period grounded their claims for national recognition in bourgeois values that contested stereotypes about black sexuality, which I will discuss further in a later section.

Defining black bodies in increasingly more precise detail stems from the emergent biopolitics of the period, specifically, nativist and eugenic discourses and practices focused on maintaining the imagined purity—and thus health—of national blood. The state’s regulation of marriage, of the private, domestic sphere, reveals the power the state could exercise over life, specifically through reproduction and sexuality, with the purported goal of safeguarding the well-being of future generations. The conflation of racial mixing with racial degeneracy buttressed both anti-miscegenation laws and laws that prevented people with hereditary diseases from marrying. In this sense, anti-miscegenation laws were bound up in discourses of biofuturity, which conflated racial purity and genetic fitness in representations of the future health of both the individual and the national body. In biofuturist discourse by both white and black Americans, then hereditary, and hence racial, fitness was bound up in racial purity, in imagining distinctly white and black bodies.

²⁶ Berlant, *Queen of America*, p. 245.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Fit for Uplift: Biofuturity and the New Negro

Black uplift movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were a response to the disenfranchisement, segregation, and violent treatment African Americans experienced at the hands of whites. Northern migration and the expansion of black educational institutions forged a new national conception of black identity, which emerged in conjunction with the proliferation of whiteness as a racial category. The ideology of liberal, middle-class black uplift movements was predicated in large part on the adoption of bourgeois morality as an essential precondition for race progress. Values such as temperance, thrift, chastity, social purity, patriarchal authority, and the accumulation of wealth were central both to Booker T. Washington's "self-help"–focused uplift campaign and to Du Bois's civil rights–oriented movement.²⁸ The centrality of these bourgeois values within uplift campaigns tended to exacerbate class differences and reinforce traditional gender norms; therefore, access to citizenship, equality, and human rights via this assimilationist strategy was very limited and conditional claim.²⁹ In an effort to counter the continued segregation of African Americans from the body politic, class differences within the African American community as a result of education and economic status were often read as the result of "better biology." On the surface,

²⁸ While there are of course important differences between Washington's and Du Bois's uplift strategies, particularly in how they conceptualize the role of education, I understand both as more mainstream, liberal movements as opposed to the more radical New Negro campaigns, for example, the socialist, anti-imperialist internationalism of Hubert Harrison or the popular nationalism of Marcus Garvey.

²⁹ For a more detailed analysis of the intra-racial class dynamics of uplift, see Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. 3.

privileging class over racial distinctions appeared to offer a more democratic means of “sorting” the population, by seeming to provide a standard to which all could aspire, regardless of race. However, rather than expanding the social and economic possibilities for African Americans, this strategy tended to solidify social differences based on economic inequalities.

Black uplift campaigns tended to link class distinctions between African Americans to biology. For instance, in Du Bois’ call for uplift, the professions—specifically medicine and sociology—converge as a counterforce to the “disease” and “criminality” that threaten to degrade black manhood.³⁰ His emphasis on sexual purity places his discourse firmly within the dominant middle-class discourse of normative sexual practices as representative of superior character. Du Bois’s “talented tenth” exemplifies the way in which superior “character” takes on a quality of genetic fitness; the talented tenth comprised the “exceptional men,” “the best of this race” who are charged with both representing the African American community to the white nation and improving the mental, moral, and physical health of the rest black of the masses.³¹ Embodying abstract ideals of American liberalism as the epitome of national character, this talented tenth, “exceptional” African American men and women who are fit representatives of national (white) culture, serve the mission of uplift by

³⁰ Du Bois differs from Booker T. Washington in his emphasis on education as a means of improving not only the condition of life but the quality of African American character. For instance, Du Bois calls for education that makes its object the inculcation of “manhood” rather than economic survival: “If we make money the object of man-training, we shall develop money-makers but not necessarily men; if we make technical skill the object of education, we may possess artisans but not, in nature, men. Men we shall only have if we make manhood the object of the work of the schools.” See W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Talented Tenth,” in *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of Today* (New York: J. Pott, 1903).

³¹ Du Bois, “The Talented Tenth.”

indoctrinating the black masses into middle-class American culture. In connecting the improvement in the social position of African Americans to biologically “better” black bodies, Du Bois’s paradigm of uplift is entrenched in the culture biofuturity, in which better bodies were imagined to be central to the improvement of social relations.³² That is, he imagines that the reproduction of white culture in the black family will improve both the black race and the national body, in effect merging oppositional identities—“an American, a Negro”—to thereby forge an uplifted, improved, modern black American subject.³³ The fact that leading African American political and cultural figures of the Progressive Era employed racist science discourse suggests the pervasiveness of this scientific paradigm.

In his rendering of the talented tenth, Du Bois emphasized traditional patriarchal gender norms, such as manhood and chastity, signifying the centrality of the “romance of the patriarchal family” to mainstream liberal uplift movements, particularly as a way to stake a claim for bourgeois respectability. Indeed, “manhood” was a precondition for the attainment of liberal political rights, yet at the same time, much of what defined that notion of manhood was predicated on the recognition of a subjectivity delimited by the tenets of liberal individualism, specifically, liberty,

³² The management of social relations via the regulation of the body and bodily functions is a key component of biofuturity, in that both class and racial distinctions offered a means for the state to regulate (sexual) interactions of individual bodies with the ultimate end of controlling the future life of the species. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

³³ In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois writes that “the history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face.” W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), p. 11.

responsibility, and property. The ability to embody the (masculine) ideals of bourgeois liberalism, then, was essential to both the project of black self-making and the larger uplift goals of achieving political recognition for African Americans after the Civil War.³⁴ However, the normative embodiment of the liberal citizen-subject was delimited not only by masculinity but also by whiteness, which meant that African American males were always already denied access to the rights of citizenship. As the identity of citizen-subject became open to black men, racial essentialism became an increasingly pervasive means for whites to differentiate themselves from freedmen, with race becoming increasingly understood as biologically determined.

As the liberal citizen-subject is by definition masculine, black political subjectivity was also dependent on patriarchal gender norms that emphasized the home and the marriage bond, what Kevin Gaines calls “the crucial site of race building.”³⁵ Indeed, Francis E.W. Harper emphasizes the right to legally marry as one of the most significant outcomes of emancipation. She writes, “It is nearly thirty years since an emancipated people stood on the threshold of a new era, facing an uncertain future—a legally unmarried race.”³⁶ To middle-class African Americans, then,

³⁴ As Hartman argues in *Scenes of Subjection*, the racial future of African Americans after the Civil War was dependent on the transformation of former slaves into rational, liberal citizen-subjects. She asserts that “the invocation of manhood must be understood as both an invitation to freedmen to enter the brotherhood of man and an instantiation of the divide between freedmen and men, since white propertied men modeled masculinity. The cultivation of responsible manhood compelled the protection of basic civil rights that would enable the freed to become self-sustaining independent laborers, home owners, and providers for their family, and at the same time, underscored the distance between the freed and the white propertied men who were presumably their counterparts,” p. 176.

³⁵ Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*,” p. 12.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 285.

marriage signified control over their bodies, their sexuality, and their reproductive futures, a control that was still largely denied them in other institutions and associations. This emphasis on traditional gender norms of course greatly circumscribed the possibilities for black women's participation in uplift, which underscored their reproductive capacity and their roles as mothers. African American women activists negotiated this emphasis on traditional domestic gender roles for women in often contradictory ways. For instance, Francis E.W. Harper writes in "Coloured Women of America" that "women as a class are quite equal to the men in energy and executive ability," and that "mothers are the levers which move in education. The men talk about it, especially about election time if they want an office for self or their candidate, but the women work most for it."³⁷ Here, Harper asserts the centrality of women to education, a primary aspect of uplift campaigns, yet at the same time, she uses "women" and "mothers" interchangeably, essentializing women's identity as mothers. In fact, she advocates for the necessity of a maternalist conception of uplift, by arguing that self-sacrifice and self-surrender must be "awakened and developed" in order to achieve racial progress.³⁸ These values of self-sacrifice and self-surrender mark the way in which ideologies of motherhood are predicated on women's self-negation, while revealing the primary role of reproduction—both physical and social—in both black and white biofuturist discourse.

³⁷ Francis E.W. Harper, "Coloured Women of America," in *A Brighter Coming Day: A Francis Ellen Watkins Harper Reader*, ed. and intro. by Frances Smith Foster (New York: The Feminist Press, 1990), p. 271. First published January 15, 1878, in *Englishwoman's Review*.

³⁸ Harper, "A Factor in Human Progress," in *A Brighter Coming Day: A Francis Ellen Watkins Harper Reader*. Originally published in *African Methodist Episcopal Church Review* 2 (1885), 14-8.

Yet Harper also suggests that character is not strictly something that can be taught; rather she insists New Negro mothers must be attentive to the “laws of heredity and environment” by, for instance, introducing heredity and “the influence of good and bad conditions upon the home life of the race” into their literary circles.³⁹ She writes, “For stolen money and slandered character we may make reparation, but the opportunity of putting the right stamp on an antenatal life, if once gone, is gone forever.”⁴⁰ Her emphasis on heredity and environment, especially the environment of the home, in relation to the future of the race adds a eugenic dimension to her discussion of “character,” and she reiterates the responsibility of race mothers to cultivate that character through both genetically advantageous marriages and the education of children. For instance, she writes, “We need mothers who are capable of being character builders...whose homes will be an uplifting power in the race.”⁴¹ Indeed, she celebrates what she calls the “aristocracy of character,” which she privileges over wealth and talent. In this way then the home, or the private sphere, becomes a primary site of uplift as part of an effort to improve the racial future through better breeding. This “better breeding” is dependent on both heredity and the inculcation of liberal bourgeois norms, which reinforced a patriarchal gender ideology that construed women and children as male property, the possession of which was a precondition of men’s recognition as citizen-subjects. Read in this context, then, the home and family become ambivalent sites of security and stability for biracial women. While the home was a space of reprieve from the violence of white racism, it might

³⁹ Ibid., p. 290.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 289.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 292.

also be understood as indicative of a crisis of subjectivity for biracial women in its the imperative to reproduce the future of the race. That is, if the role of women in uplift movements was primarily reproductive, biracial women's literal embodiment of the color line troubled her capacity for reproducing the black race. Hysteria, then, might be read as a result of the indeterminacy of the mixed-race women.

Reconstructing Hysteria: American Nervousness on the Color Line

Hysteria, as with many diseases and disorders, changed over time as a result of the expansion of medical knowledge, shifting gender roles, and the reorganization of social relations. Diseases such as hysteria, which are constantly redefined and eventually renamed or eliminated from the medical lexicon, call attention to the ways in which a specific disease is both a social construct and a cultural artifact that changes over time and that has disparate consequences for different populations.⁴² Like other nervous disorders, such as neurasthenia, the disease tended to be classified as primarily affecting middle-class white women. However, as Carol Smith-Rosenberg

⁴² Carol Smith-Rosenberg's work in *Disorderly Conduct* on hysteria reveals that hysteria was not only a middle-class condition: "It is only a covert romanticism, however, that permits us to assume that lower-class (*sic*) and farm women, because their economic functions within the family were more vital than those of their more decorative and economically secure urban sisters, escaped their sense of frustration, conflict, or confusion. Normative prescriptions of proper womanly behavior were certainly internalized by many poorer women. The desire to marry and the belief that a woman's social status came not from the exercise of her own talents and efforts but from her ability to attract a competent male protector were as universal among lower-class and farm women as among middle- and upper-class urban women. For some of these women—as for their urban, middle-class sisters—the traditional female role provided functional, bringing material and psychic rewards. But for some it did not. The discontinuity between the child and adult female roles, along with the failure to develop substantial ego strengths, crossed class and geographic barriers—as did hysteria itself. Physicians connected with almshouses, and, later in the century, with urban hospitals and dispensaries, often reported hysteria among immigrant and tenement-house women," p. 200. Although a physical signifier of ideological incongruity, hysteria also represented "overcivilization," and in that sense working class women and women of color with hysteria might stake a claim for themselves as more physically similar to middle-class white women than some medical literature acknowledged.

suggests, hysteria was also common among working class women and rural women, whom she argues also experienced conflict between internalized dominant gender norms and the embodied realities of womanhood. Although a physical signifier of ideological incongruity, hysteria also represented “overcivilization,” and in that sense working class women and women of color with hysteria might stake a claim for themselves as more physically similar to middle-class white women than some medical literature acknowledged.

Physicians generally attributed hysteria to deficits in women’s physical constitution, specifically their supposedly more sensitive nervous systems and thinner blood. The disease was also commonly linked to women’s reproductive organs. Until the mid-nineteenth century, when physicians became “more flexible” in diagnosing the disease, the most common manifestation of hysteria was the hysterical fit. By the end of the century, the catalog of possible symptoms had expanded to include a much broader set of bodily sensations. These physical symptoms were almost all-encompassing, and included nervousness; depression; the tendency to cry; chronic fatigue; nausea; headaches; physical pain, especially in the chest, knees, hip, spine, or neck; the loss of feeling in part or all of the body; the loss of hearing, vision, taste, or smell; numbness of the skin; the inability to swallow; muscle contractions; and even paralysis in the extremities. Hysteria was perceived as causing “female complaints” ranging from menstrual pain and irregularity, prolapsed or tipped uterus, uterine tumor, vaginal infections and discharges, and sterility.⁴³ In his *American Nervousness*, George M. Beard, the well-known neurologist known as the “father of neurasthenia,”

⁴³ Ibid.

links hysteria directly to motherhood, asserting that childbirth was a “measure of nerve-strength,” and that in fact, the “simple act of giving birth to a child opens the door to unnumbered woes; beginning with lacerations and relaxations, extending to displacements and ovarian imprisonments, and ending by setting the whole system on fire with neuralgias, tremors, etc and compelling a life-long slavery to sleeplessness, hysteria, or insanity.”⁴⁴ Beard argues that the processes of childbirth and nursing are “physiological” when women are in “perfect health,” but that “for the last half century, among the upper classes of this country, they have become pathological; they have become signs of disease.”⁴⁵ Thus, in Beard’s framework, hysterical women pose a threat to reproductive futurity, in that their illness renders their childbearing “pathological.” Beard’s work is an example of the way in which medicine constructed women’s reproductive organs, and even their capacity to reproduce, as having disabling effects on female bodies, such that “normal” or “healthy” becomes an impossible condition for women.

Yet physicians had difficulty locating an “organic explanation” for the illness, and much of the medical writing on hysteria reveals physicians’ anxiety that the disease may in fact have been “ideational,” that is, that women might have been faking it.⁴⁶ Doctors’ suspicion that women may have been “faking” illness reveals how doctors’ medical authority trumped women’s own knowledge of their bodies.

Interestingly, as the symptoms of hysteria began to multiply, the treatment methods

⁴⁴ George M. Beard, *American Nervousness, Its Causes and Consequence* (New York: G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1881), p. 76-7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

began to intensify. Doctors enacted violence on the bodies of women diagnosed with hysteria in the name of restoring them to health; however, their treatments were brutal and painful. For instance, women were subjected to painful therapy that included electric-shock treatment, “blistering,” multiple operations, and even amputations.⁴⁷ Through the disfigurement and mutilation of women’s bodies, these doctors seem to have been attempting to leave a visible trace of an illness that could not be readily discerned.

Hysteria was as much about race as it was about gender, in that the hysterical woman was constructed within medical and scientific discourse in opposition to another figure, the “savage woman.”⁴⁸ Yet, this opposition breaks down in medical practice. Hysteria, as previously discussed, was understood as a white, middle-class women’s disease, which was perceived as stemming from their overexertion in public endeavors and as ultimately impairing their reproductive capacity, thereby threatening the future of the race. However, black and working-class white women’s bodies were most often the object of study and experimentation. Medical discourse of the period distinguished black women’s bodies as hardier—healthier, even—than white women’s bodies, as they were said to not suffer from hysteria and (“related”) gynecological and obstetrical disorders, to give birth easily, and to be less sensitive to pain. The physical differences said to distinguish white and black women’s bodies tended to be reinforce a racist ideology of evolutionary progress, which took white women’s bodies to be more evolved and advanced. For instance, as Briggs’ work reveals, it was widely held

⁴⁷ Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, p. 201.

⁴⁸ Laura Briggs, “The Race of Hysteria: ‘Overcivilization’ and the ‘Savage’ Woman in Late Nineteenth-Century Obstetrics and Gynecology” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (2000).

that women's pelvis size correlated to the head size of children. Thus, it was believed that black women's pelvises were smaller than those of white women because white babies had larger brains. Although black women's bodies were constructed as distinct from white women's, they were most often subject to experimentation, both because they were believed to be insensate to pain and because they were a less protected social group. The contradiction then is that black women's bodies, which were understood as anatomically distinct from white women's, became the basis of contemporary medical and scientific knowledge of women's bodies used to treat the reproductive disorders of white women, disorders such as hysteria which the medical profession did not recognize as occurring in black women.

Hysteria, as a strain of this nervous condition, was not simply a social construct that enforced racial and gender norms. Rather, it was physical response to the shifting social relations of modernity, and specifically to the violent response by Southern whites to the social restructuring of the nation. This physical manifestation had the potential to "reconstruct subjectivity" or to refashion the self in relation to a world in flux.⁴⁹ Thus, illnesses such as hysteria and neurasthenia can be understood as racialized symptoms of the emergence of a newly wealthy leisure class as a result of industrialization. African American writers' textual deployment of middle-class illnesses, such as hysteria, that previously were associated solely with whiteness can be read as a trope through which these novels perform the cultural work of

⁴⁹ Tom Lutz argues that nervousness, rather than indicative of a specific medical condition, denotes a "structure of conjuncture" in which "competing cultural processes and products" coalesce within a discourse to enforce social positions in a time of flux. Tom Lutz, *American Nervousness, 1903: An Antecedent History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

reconstructing black subjectivity in response to the expansion of the black middle class.

The Hysterical Mulatta

Iola Leroy: Or Shadows Uplifted

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's *Iola Leroy* is perhaps the best-selling novel by an African American writer prior to the 20th century.⁵⁰ African American scholars such as Hazel Carby and Frances Smith Foster have deemed the novel the "culmination" of her career by, as in the text, Harper incorporates many of the essays and speeches she had crafted over the course of her work as a civil rights activist.⁵¹ By 1892, when *Iola Leroy* was published, Harper had been writing and publishing poetry and short prose for 47 years.⁵² Foster suggests the novel marks an interesting transitional moment in literature between the antebellum period and the Harlem

⁵⁰ Frances Smith Foster, "Introduction," *Iola Leroy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁵¹ However, Carby notes in *Reconstructing Womanhood* that many literary critics have read *Iola Leroy* as Harper's "least successful project," p. 63. In fact, *Iola Leroy* was severely critiqued by earlier generations of literary scholars as heavily derivative of William Wells Brown's 1864 novel, *Clotelle*, which was first published in the United States as a dime novel intended for Civil War soldiers. Brown's novel was first published in London in 1853 as *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States*, while Brown was considered an escaped slave under U.S. law. The novel claims to recount the story of Thomas Jefferson's slave mistress and their daughter and granddaughter. Brown wrote three other versions of the novel, the final titled *Clotelle; or The Colored Heroine*, published in 1867. I use the spelling of this version, as it seems to be the most common rendering

⁵² Harper began her career as a lecturer in 1853 while teaching in Little York, Pennsylvania, when a law passed in Maryland allowed free blacks in the state to be sold as slaves. She gave her first lecture in August 1854 to a public meeting in New Bedford, Massachusetts, titled "Elevation and the Education of the Colored Race." The next month, she began touring for the Antislavery Society of Maine. She lectured for 6 years while assisting the Underground Railroad, until 1860 when she married Fenton Harper. After her husband's death 4 years later, she returned to the lecture circuit. Interestingly, although, or perhaps because she was such an engaging speaker, Harper's career was dogged by rumors that she was actually a man, or that she was really white but delivered her lectures in black face. Foster, "Introduction."

Renaissance, and is a bridge between “women’s fiction” and the race question.⁵³

Indeed, *Iola Leroy* was published a year prior to the speech Harper gave at the 1893 World Congress of Representative Women, in which she declared that moment “the threshold of the women’s era.”⁵⁴ The novel’s preoccupation with the title character’s role in the new black community registers the increasing contribution of African American women to civil rights activism through publishing fiction and nonfiction, founding journals, making speeches, and organizing politically for suffrage and uplift.

The novel also bridges antebellum and post-Reconstruction black activism; while it centers on slavery and emancipation in the context of the Civil War, these issues, in conjunction with black citizenship, were very salient to the post-Reconstruction period in response to disenfranchisement, lynching, and Jim Crow segregation. In fact, as P. Gabrielle Foreman demonstrates, what she calls “the politics of naming” in the novel speaks directly to the political struggles of the period in that Harper employs “homonymic connections to historical personages,” that is, the character’s names signal to contemporary readers their connections to black activists and reform movements. “Iola,” for example, would have registered to contemporary readers “a long tradition of protest and resistance,” as when the novel was published in 1892, “Iola” was a well-known pseudonym in the Black community for activist Ida B. Wells, who often signed correspondence with that name.⁵⁵ This strategy of blending

⁵³ Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*. Harper’s story “The Two Offers,” published in 1859 in the *Anglo-African Magazine*, foreshadows many of the themes of *Iola Leroy*. “The Two Offers” is thought to be the first short story published in the U.S. by an African-American writer.

⁵⁴ Foster, “Introduction.”

⁵⁵ Foreman, *Activist Sentiments*. Other “homonymic associations” include Martin Delany and Lucy Delaney for the character Lucille Delany and George and Lewis Latimer for the character of Dr. Latimer.

the historical novel with literary realism by merging referents to the past and the present, what Foreman dubs “histotextuality,” is a means to reveal the continuity of historical processes.

Harper’s novel is at its core a story about the complicated (and complicating) genealogies of Southern families, both black and white, as a result of the experience of slavery.⁵⁶ At the center of the novel is Iola Leroy, a biracial woman who is one-eighth black and as a result is remanded into slavery upon the death of her white father.⁵⁷ As Carby argues, “Iola, as mulatta, allowed Harper to use the literary conventions of women’s fiction and to draw on ideologies of womanhood in her heroine’s fall from security. But the mulatta also enabled Harper to express the relationship between white privilege and black lack of privilege, for her heroine situated her advantages and social position in direct relation to a system of exploitation.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, the use of the figure of the mulatta allowed Harper to challenge the national “myth of absolute racial difference” that undergirded the emerging construct of whiteness.⁵⁹ Yet with the novel, Harper also negotiates a larger story of an interconnected black diaspora separated through slavery and struggling to reunite after emancipation. Although the novel does not narrate the events chronologically, we can locate the beginning of Iola’s story with her mother, Marie; in fact, Marie’s and Iola’s stories parallel each other in interesting ways. Both women act as nurses; both experience slavery,

⁵⁷ Carby argues in *Reconstructing Womanhood*, “As an heiress, Iola represented a threat to a patriarchal system of inheritance, and her father’s cousin, Alfred Lorraine, restored the patriarchal order by returning the women—Marie, Grace, and Iola—and the son, Harry, to their rightful inheritance, slavery. As slave, Iola could not inherit from her paternal ancestors, but had to follow the condition of her mother,” p. 76.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁵⁹ See Hale, p. 40.

although at very different points in their lives; both have Northern educations; both receive marriage proposals from white men; and both suffer from hysteria or nervous disorders. As Michele Birnbaum has argues, Iola's nervous condition, like her racial identity, is inherited from her mother.⁶⁰ Indeed, the narrative structure itself suggests the interconnectedness of Marie and Iola's stories, particularly their romantic relationships. That is, immediately after Iola receives a marriage proposal from the white physician, Dr. Gresham, who urges Iola pass as white as part of his proposal, the narrative is interrupted and readers are transported back twenty years to the beginning of Iola's parents' marriage. As her parents' decision to conceal Iola's mother's biracial identity from their children was responsible for Iola's crisis, this shift to her family origin suggests the dangers of obscuring racial history.

Marie, like Iola later does, served as a nurse to her future husband Eugene Leroy, a wealthy Southern plantation owner. Readers learn of the beginnings of their relationship through a conversation between the more progressive Eugene and his cousin, Alfred Lorraine, who debate the sexual politics of slavery in a didactic style that characterizes much of the novel's narrative throttle. Leroy, we learn, was debilitated by an unhealthy, overindulgent, decadent lifestyle; returning from adventures abroad in "foreign lands," he finds himself "a broken-down young man, prematurely old, my constitution a perfect wreck."⁶¹ His soul had been "pervaded with a moral paralysis," and he became "acquainted with death, the death of true

⁶⁰ "The condition of the mother" was a term used to describe the condition of slavery, as free or slave status was determined by the status of one's mother. Birnbaum, *Race, Work, and Desire in American Literature: 1860-1930*.

⁶¹ Harper, *Iola Leroy*, p. 68.

manliness and self-respect.”⁶² Ironically, it is Marie, an enslaved “quadroon,” who nurses Leroy “back to life and health,” thereby restoring his manhood and his status within the community. Her virtue, purity, and goodness gave him new life by killing every “unholy passion” lurking in his heart. Leroy gives her new life as well, as he in turn “uplifts” Marie by sending her to a Northern school. When she has graduated, he manumits her and the two are married.

Of course, Marie’s marriage is her recourse to freedom, yet it is a conditional freedom dependent on her marriage to Leroy. Indeed, Leroy’s marriage to Marie might be read not as a sort of emancipation for Marie but as a new type of possession. When, after Marie has graduated from school, she thanks Leroy and calls him “master,” he silences her by telling her she is free and that she must not call him by that name again. Rather, he “has a nearer and dearer one by which [he wishes] to be called”; readers, however, do not learn the name, as he whispers it in her ear, exclaiming “this is the hand the hand that plucked me from the grave, and I am going to retain it as mine, mine.”⁶³ Leroy’s emphasis on possession, on making Marie his, suggests that black women’s relationships were constrained by both the institutionalized practice of white male violence against black women and the legal code that protects white male privilege. Indeed, Harper seems here to be insisting on the impossibility of an equitable relationship between white men and black women. In this sense, we can read Leroy’s “proposal,” in his insistence on possessing Marie, as a critique of the romantic fantasy of freedom from slavery through marriage to a white

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Harper, *Iola Leroy*, p. 74.

man.

Rape laws and anti-miscegenation laws reveal the anxiety of the Southern white male elite over preventing sexual relations between black men and white women, precisely at the height of sexual relations between white men and black women.⁶⁴ Not surprisingly perhaps, the lynching of black men for the rape of white women did not become a normalized practice until after emancipation, when enslaved black men no longer served as a source of economic capital for white men. Laws against sexual assault did not protect enslaved black women from rape by their masters, and if a white man other than her master assaulted an enslaved woman, the offense was legally construed not as a crime against the woman but against her master. As Peter Bardaglio asserts, the institutionalization of rape “allowed slaveholders to further their social control over the slave community and served to increase their supply of labor, since they became the owners of any offspring resulting from these encounters.”⁶⁵ White masters who raped bondswomen justified their acts of sexual violence with the common mythology that figured black women as sexually promiscuous. Harper critiques this system throughout *Iola Leroy*, with the primary instance being Leroy’s conversation with his cousin, Alfred Lorraine. When Leroy confides to Lorraine that he intends to marry Marie, one of his slaves, his cousin exclaims, “Why man, she is your property, to have and to hold to all intents and purposes. Are you not satisfied with the power and possession the law gives you?” Leroy’s response is that “although the law makes her helpless in my hands, to me her

⁶⁴ See Peter W. Bardaglio, “Rape and the Law in the Old South: ‘Calculated to excite Indignation in every heart,’” *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (1994).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 757.

defenselessness is her best defense.”⁶⁶ Lorraine’s attitude reflects the dominant ideology of Southern plantation culture, as defined by Angela Davis, that sexual coercion was “an essential dimension of the social relations between slave master and slave. In other words, the right claimed by slave owners and their agents over the bodies of female slaves was a direct expression of their presumed property rights over Black people as a whole.”⁶⁷ Yet the men’s discussion is also pervaded with the discourse of eugenics that was increasingly employed to justify racial segregation and violence after the war. For instance, Lorraine insists that anti-miscegenation laws were a means to maintain racial purity, while Leroy argues that it is the plantation system of rape and concubinage itself that is “sapping our strength and undermining our character.”⁶⁸ Both rely on the eugenic rhetoric of “racial purity” and “degradation” to support their points, revealing the way anxiety over racial degeneration after Reconstruction structured how authors such as Harper reconstructed and represented the histories and legacies of slavery in the U.S.

After her marriage to Leroy, Marie cannot escape the “shadow” of slavery; she resides as mistress on Leroy’s plantation, but she is haunted both by the conditionality of her freedom and the enslavement of those around her.⁶⁹ She broaches with her husband the issue of the hypocrisy of her situation and the injustice of the institution, urging him to “get out of it [owning slaves] as quickly as possible.”⁷⁰ She goes on to confess her anxiety over the precariousness of her position, and relates a vision she

⁶⁶ Harper, *Iola Leroy*, p. 65.

⁶⁷ Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), p. 175.

⁶⁸ Harper, *Iola Leroy*, p. 71.

⁶⁹ While Carby suggests that Marie, Iola’s mother, marries a white man for love, I would argue that it would be difficult to locate consent in a relationship structured by such extreme power differentials.

⁷⁰ Harper, *Iola Leroy*, p. 79.

had that she and her children were remanded to slavery: “I never can be satisfied in the South with such a possibility hanging over my head.” Leroy’s response is to suggest that she is “growing nervous”; that is, he pathologizes Marie’s critique of slavery and diagnoses her anxiety over the instability of her social position as a nervous disorder.⁷¹ Marie’s “hysteria” also flares up in the presence of Leroy’s cousin, Lorraine, who fills her with “a nameless dread”; in his presence, her hands become cold and she “grows nervous.” Although Leroy perceives the physical effects of his cousin’s visit on Marie, when Marie confesses she foresees Lorraine remanding her to slavery, her husband dismisses her fear: “Marie, I do not think so. Your life is too lonely here.”⁷² Leroy attributes her nervousness to her social isolation, as a result of her segregation from the elite white plantation community because of her race and status as a former slave; yet it is also symptomatic of her own crisis of subjectivity as a former slave who is now mistress of a slave plantation. Hysteria, then, can be read here as what David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder refer to as a “narrative prosthesis” in its metaphorical use of illness to signal anxiety about the unstable position of black women in relation to white men.⁷³ In this instance, hysterical symptoms emerge in the context of a biracial female character’s relationships with white men, as Marie is struck with a nervous attack in the midst of social interaction with both her white husband and her husband’s white cousin. Her nervousness calls into question the possibility of consensual relations, sexual, marital, or otherwise, between black

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 80.

⁷² Ibid, p. 89- 90.

⁷³ Mitchell and Snyder define narrative prosthesis as a “perpetual discursive dependency” on disability in order to signify social and individual collapse. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, “Narrative Prosthesis and the Materiality of Metaphor,” in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006).

women and white men during this period. Yet it is also a manifestation of a crisis of subjectivity, as Marie must deny her racial identity and that of her children. This example serves to collapse the two meanings of hysteria that weave through the semantic landscape of the word during this period. In one sense, hysteria was experienced as a physical and mental illness predominant in middle-class white women. In another, it was a collective, violent reaction to perceived threats to white hegemony.

Although Leroy reassures Marie that her and their children's freedom is secure—"I have manumitted you, and the children will follow your condition"—when he dies, Marie and Iola are eventually subject to slavery.⁷⁴ Interestingly, Leroy dies of yellow fever, a disease infused with signifiers of race and class, and his death seems to implicate him as a passive contributor to the racial identity crisis wrought on the South by miscegenation. That is, although Leroy has married and freed his wife and raises his children legitimately, his maintenance of slaves and his insistence that his children's mixed-race identity remain hidden perpetuates a system of ambiguous familial and racial genealogy. In fact, we might read "yellow" as an ambiguous marker of race, as a marker of racial hybridity, and Leroy's death by yellow fever literally as death induced by his passivity in relation to the question of slavery. Immediately following Leroy's death and the invalidation of his marriage to Marie, Marie and her youngest daughter, Grace, become "invalids" themselves when they are struck with brain fever. Grace eventually dies, while Marie recovers and Iola is sold.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Harper, *Iola Leroy*, p. 81.

⁷⁵ As Carby argues in *Reconstructing Womanhood*, "The characterization of Marie and Gracie, as their

Iola's initial whiteness and her transformation from a Southern white woman into an enslaved mulatta forges a connection between the experience of sexual violence by black and biracial women, and the panic over white slavery at the turn of the century. Although Iola is first introduced in the novel in Chapter 5, as a slave who is "a reg'lar spitfire," her whiteness renders her enslavement incongruous. (She is described as having "putty blue eyes," and being "jis' ez white ez anybody's in dis place."⁷⁶) Indeed, when it is revealed to Dr. Gresham, Iola's white suitor, that she is a slave, he exclaims, "A woman as white as she a slave?"⁷⁷ As Iola has been sold several times because she refuses to submit to her master's will, whether she managed to escape rape at the hands of the various slave owners who purchased her is subject to debate and might be read as central to her experience of hysteria. In effect, the ambiguity surrounding Iola's whiteness mirrors that surrounding her sexual purity. For instance, Tom, the former slave who is responsible for freeing Iola, remarks that her master "meant to break her in," suggesting of course that he intended to sexually violate her. Yet he also recounts that when her owner made advances toward her, Iola insisted she would "die first." Later in the novel, Iola speaks of being "tried but not tempted" by the men who purchased her, as follows.

I was sold from State to State as an article of merchandise. I had outrages heaped on me which might well crimson the cheek of honest womanhood with shame, but I never fell into the clutches of an owner for whom I did not feel the utmost loathing and intensest horror. I have heard men talk glibly of the degradation of the negro, but there is a vast difference between abasement of condition and degradation of

names indicate, are closer to the weak and passive heroines who, once victimized, die graceful deaths," p. 76.

⁷⁶ Harper, *Iola Leroy*, p. 38.

⁷⁷ Harper, *Iola Leroy*, p. 58.

character. I was abased, but the men who trampled on me were the degraded ones.⁷⁸

As this passage suggests, Iola quite possibly was the victim of sexual abuse and “abasement,” yet Harper, through Iola, insists that this abuse does not sully the character of the woman, but of the perpetrator. Iola’s racial and sexual ambiguity disrupts racialized gender constructs that polarize white women as virtuous and black women as sexually available. Furthermore, Iola’s whiteness is a means to engender social empathy in white readers; yet by aligning Iola and other biracial characters with black uplift and reform movements, Harper transforms the trope of the mulatta into a powerful statement about racial subjectivity in which her characters actively seize the scene of self-making.

The transformation of Iola’s racial subjectivity from white to black is initiated with an act of sexual aggression. Iola understands herself according to the laws of comportment that define white women, as she does not yet possess the knowledge of her racial history. Yet the man who attacks her treats her as an enslaved black woman. This encounter makes explicit the dominant social construct of black women as sexually available, while eliciting a crisis of subjectivity for Iola. It is not that this violent incident gives rise to a black consciousness, but rather that it renders Iola conscious of the disparate treatment black women receive. After Iola’s father dies, his cousin Lorraine has her remitted to slavery in an attempt to claim Leroy’s estate for himself. When Iola learns soon after that her father is dead and that she is, legally and socially if not physically, black, she bursts into “peals of hysterical laughter,”

⁷⁸ Harper, *Iola Leroy*, p. 115.

suggesting that hysteria in “mulatta” characters manifests as a result of a crisis of racial subjectivity that is deeply connected to both sexual violence and submerged family histories. The experience of rupture in racial identity, family structure, and social position, Harper suggests, has lasting affects on Iola’s nervous system. For instance, while she is working as a nurse for the Union army immediately upon her release from slavery, “Iola, after a continuous strain upon her nervous for months, began to suffer from general debility and nervous depression.”⁷⁹ She is cautioned by the white physician, Dr. Gresham, who is both her boss and her suitor, that she is “running down” and that if she does not take a furlough and go North for a rest, she “will be [the] patient instead of [the] nurse.”⁸⁰ Yet by diagnosing Iola and recommending treatment, Dr. Gresham has already designated Iola the patient. His knowledge of her racial history illuminates his emphasis on her need to go North to recuperate from “running down.” That is, Gresham suggests that returning to the North will counteract the degenerative effects on her health that she experiences as a result of her journey to the South and into slavery. Returning North, then, implies a return to whiteness, to her former identity as a white woman as a means of curing the nervous disorder that is symptomatic of her “condition” as a mixed-race woman. Later, Iola receives a teaching position, “but before the term was quite over she was forced to resign, her health having been so undermined by the fearful strain through which she had passed, that she was quite unequal to the task.”⁸¹ The description of Iola’s health having been undermined by fear suggests that in this novel, hysteria

⁷⁹ Harper, *Iola Leroy*, p. 112.

⁸⁰ Harper, *Iola Leroy*, p. 60.

⁸¹ Harper, *Iola Leroy*, p. 200.

functions as a racial marker of anxiety over enslavement, interestingly, on the eve of legalized segregation and at a moment in which racial violence was escalating in the wake of the failure of Reconstruction.

Of One Blood

Like Harper, in her writing, Pauline Hopkins' was committed to anti-racist activism and to employing narrative as a means of education for the black public through the retelling of history, particularly of the racial history of the U.S. As Carby notes in her introduction to the Schomburg Library of Hopkins's magazine novels, the novels she serialized—as opposed to her first work, *Contending Forces*—illustrate Hopkins efforts to establish a distinctly African American popular fiction, and in the service of that end, her serialized novels incorporated more sensational narrative devices, such as suspense, action, adventure, complex plotting, multiple and false identities, and characters in disguise.⁸² Hopkins serialized *Of One Blood*, published serially from 1902 to 1903, as well as *Hagar's Daughter* and *Winona*, in the *Colored American Magazine*, the first national magazine produced and cooperatively owned by African Americans; Hopkins contributed to the magazine both as a writer and as a primary editor.⁸³ The periodical was a forerunner of the Harlem Renaissance, and

⁸² Hazel Carby, "Introduction," *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins* (New York: Oxford Universities Press, 1988).

⁸³ *Ibid.* Carby cites William Brathwaite's article "Nero America's First Magazine," in which he suggests Hopkins commanded substantial editorial authority, although her name was not included on the masthead until 1903. As both Carby and Susan Gillman discuss, editorial control of the periodical shifted in 1904 as a result of the increasing of Booker T. Washington, new ownership by the National Negro Business League, and a move from Boston to New York. Gillman emphasizes that these changes in part functioned to undermine the more radical political commitment Hopkins had instilled as editor. Carby, "Introduction"; Susan Gillman, "Pauline Hopkins and the Occult:

served as a vehicle for black cultural resistance to Jim Crow segregation, black disenfranchisement, and racial violence by challenging racist ideology and reimagining relations between the races.

Hopkins' novel *Of One Blood* also negotiates the legacy of sexual violence, racial subjectivity, and concealed family genealogies through a medical lens. In reimagining race relations in the U.S., the novel reworks dominant medical and scientific discourses shaped by the racist science of eugenics, through the trope of "blood." Blood is a multivalent signifier both in the text and within contemporary discourse. It registers dominant white discourse as a legal measure of citizenship in the U.S. through the "one-drop rule," as a scientific evaluation of heredity and character based on racial difference, as a medicalized metaphor for disease or disorder, and as a fraught symbol of the contested racial purity of the nation.⁸⁴ As Keith Wailoo's work reveals, blood and its diseases were increasingly becoming defined as a field of study at the turn of the century, specifically in relation to anemia.⁸⁵ Hematology in particular served as a means of deciphering issues of racial identity and race relations through new medical technologies, such as the hemocytometer and the hemoglobinometer, which enabled scientists to count corpuscles and estimate hemoglobin. These medical practitioners used this emerging technology to produce new ways of defining health and disease identities through differences in blood. Yet as Wailoo's work demonstrates, despite the more in-depth knowledge of blood

African-American Revisions of Nineteenth Century Sciences," *American Literary History*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1996).

⁸⁴ I am here relying on Gillman's excellent discussion of the multiple ways in which "blood" is employed as a narrative strategy in the text.

⁸⁵ Keith Wailoo, *Drawing Blood: Technology and Disease Identity in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

available as a result of these new technologies, “blood” retained its power, even in the work of scientists, as a metaphor for understanding and explaining individual identities and social relations. Specifically, it often was used to provide scientific credence to hierarchical theories of racial difference such as eugenics.

In her text, Hopkins contests these dominant rhetorical codes and imbues “blood” with alternative meanings. Central to my discussion here, though, is Hopkins’ use of blood to denote family ties and the cultural taboo of incest, which undermines cultural myths of racial purity and white supremacy by uncovering the violent history of racial amalgamation wrought by white men. The novel revolves around three biracial protagonists, whose blood ties to each other as siblings and to the Ethiopian royal family of which they are heirs have been obscured as a result of the history of slavery. Blood then also signals reproduction and maternity, and thus the black female body, as the source of racial heredity, kinship, and legal status, as U.S. legal code insisted children of slave women must follow “the condition of the mother,” regardless whether their fathers were black or white. “Blood” can be linked to hysteria through the discourse of biofuturity, which imagined a national future predicated on racial purity achieved through the control of women’s reproduction. In this respect, then, hysteria in Hopkins’ novel stems from “the hidden self,” the submerged knowledge of mixed blood that must surface in order for both the dominant white racist program of segregation as well as counter-hegemonic black uplift movements to be realized.

In *Of One Blood*, Hopkins engages with William James’s theories of psychology, specifically his article “The Hidden Self,” from which Hopkins derives the novel’s subtitle, to consider the problematics of racial subjectivity at the turn of the

century.⁸⁶ In “The Hidden Self,” James deconstructs the cultural binary between science and the occult through his examination of French research on hysterical women by Jean-Martin Charcot and his students, Pierre Janet and Alfred Binet. James’s interest in these case studies stems in large part from his desire to defend his own liminal, “mystical” theories of the unconscious. Indeed, in his article, he overtly critiques the scientific academy for operating under the premise of being a “closed and completed system of truth,” in which a “different scheme is unimaginable” and unclassifiable phenomena “must be held as untrue.”⁸⁷ James cites such phenomena as “animal magnetism,” which was initially dismissed by medical scientists as “a pack of lies” but which eventually became incorporated into medical study as “hypnotic suggestion.” He is particularly interested in “contractions in the field of consciousness” caused by traumatic events, which limit the sensory input hysterics can experience and result in the splitting of the self. James describes the phenomenon as follows: “An hysteric woman abandons part of her consciousness because she is too weak nervously to hold it all together. The abandoned part, meanwhile, may solidify into a secondary or subconscious self.”⁸⁸ Janet’s use of hypnosis with his hysterical patients revealed these submerged selves—“different sensibilities, a different memory, a different person in short.”⁸⁹ These different personalities existed simultaneously within the hysterical patient, to the extent that under hypnosis, the submerged self of

⁸⁶ James published the article in *Scribner’s Magazine* in 1890. For other scholarship linking Hopkins with James’s psychological theories, see Cynthia D. Schrager, “Pauline Hopkins and William James: The New Psychology and the Politics of Race”; Thomas J. Otten, “Pauline Hopkins and the Hidden Self of Race,” *ELH* 59 (1992).

⁸⁷ William James, “The Hidden Self,” available from http://en.wikisource.org/w/index.php?title=The_Hidden_Self&printable=yes, p. 1,

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3

the hysteric acts independently and without the knowledge of the primary personality, suggesting a corporeal dimension to this split subjectivity. That is, the duality of consciousness registers physically on and through the body.

Like Harper's Iola Leroy, Dianthe Lusk in Pauline Hopkins' *Of One Blood* also experiences a crisis of racial subjectivity after being literally "awakened" to her self, her identity as a former slave forgotten as the result of a series of hypnotic trances. Hopkins's use of this discourse of mystical psychology offered an alternative way of conceptualizing black and biracial subjectivity from the more mainstream medical and scientific rhetoric, which was often employed in the service of eugenics and racist practices and programs. In Hopkins's novel, the three main biracial characters experience a split subjectivity—a "double consciousness"—that is symptomatic of their repressed racial identities. While Reuel Briggs, the cutting-edge young doctor who is passing for white, is also subject to a nervous disorder (which I will discuss at greater length later in the chapter), it is Dianthe Lusk that exhibits the characteristic (gendered) features of hysteria described by James. Reuel encounters Dianthe at a concert of the Fisk University singers where she performs; during her performance, Reuel recognizes her as the same woman who appeared to him in a vision earlier that evening. Soon after, Dianthe visits him again as an apparition, telling him she will need his help. The next day, Reuel, an expert in "brain diseases," is called to the hospital to attend to Dianthe after she is injured in a train accident. Although "she shows no sign of injury," the doctors cannot "restore her to consciousness" and she is pronounced dead by the attending physicians. Reuel, however, is able to restore Dianthe to life precisely because of his unconventional

mystico-medical approach, which challenges the ability of science to thoroughly define and master the body—and race, in particular—by exceeding the boundaries of what conventional medical science can know. Although his peers “viewed him coldly” for leaving “the beaten track of conventionality,” he alone is able to diagnose Dianthe’s true condition; she is not dead but rather is in a state of suspended animation. Reuel diagnoses Dianthe as having been “persistently subjected to mesmeric influences, and the nervous shock induced by the excitement of the accident has thrown her into a cataleptic sleep.”⁹⁰ Although revived by Reuel’s unconventional medicine, she continues to experience hysterical symptoms, as Reuel and his brother Aubrey Livingston conspire to keep her racial identity a secret. Thus, while Reuel alone possesses the ability to restore Dianthe’s health by “fixing” her racial identity, he opts to keep her race, like his own and that of Aubrey’s, open, unmarked, and undetermined.

Upon emerging from her “suspended animation,” Dianthe has lost her memory, including the memory of her racial identity. Dianthe’s physical appearance facilitates the suppression of her racial identity. Physically, she is described as “not in any way the preconceived idea of a Negro. Fair as the fairest woman in the hall, with wavy bands of chestnut hair, and great, melting eyes of brown, soft as those of childhood; a willowy figure of exquisite mould.”⁹¹ Her whiteness, like Iola’s, subverts dominant notions about the visibility of race. Yet it also allows for her manipulation at the hands of her brothers. Reuel and Aubrey keep Dianthe’s race a secret, giving her the

⁹⁰ Hopkins, p. 465.

⁹¹ Hopkins, p. 453.

white identity of Felice Adams, as both desire to possess her and her blackness would complicate their professional and personal lives. Dianthe's suppressed identity manifests in her hysterical symptoms, which include falling into a trance-like state and convulsions. During one of her hysterical attacks, she extends her arms to Reuel and exclaims, "I know much but as yet have not the power to express it: I see much clearly, much dimly of the powers and influences behind the Veil, and yet I cannot name them. Some time the full power shall be mine; and mine shall be thine."⁹² As with the hysterical patients James discusses, her shadow self surfaces in these states of semi-consciousness, allowing Dianthe to intuit the force of her African American identity that exists behind the veil. This second self emerges again later during Dianthe's musical performance of "Go Down, Moses" for the elite, white Boston social circle that adopts her. While performing, Dianthe is described as possessing "a strange rigid appearance...that was unearthly."⁹³ As she sings, the guests are overcome with horror as they hear a second voice alongside hers, "a weird contralto, veiled as it were, rising and falling alongside every wave of the great soprano, and reaching the ear as from some strange distance."⁹⁴ This moment is a literal re-awakening of her African American identity from behind the veil, as her memory returns to her, triggering a crisis of subjectivity that culminates in her falling back in a "dead faint."

Dianthe's "unearthly" appearance and the sound of the voice emerging as "from some strange distance" suggests that her African self manifests physically in the

⁹² Hopkins, p. 475.

⁹³ Hopkins, p. 501.

⁹⁴ Hopkins, p. 502.

figure of Queen Candace, whom Reuel encounters on his expedition to Africa. Candace is the virgin queen of Telassar, an ancient Ethiopian city that is the cradle of Western civilization. When Reuel first encounters Candace, her facial resemblance to Dianthe “was so striking that it was painful,” and “she was the same height as Dianthe, had the same well-developed shoulders and the same admirable bust.”⁹⁵ When she speaks to Reuel, “it seemed to him that Dianthe’s own voice was breathing in his ears.”⁹⁶ Dianthe’s physical and spiritual connection to Queen Candace is complemented by the strange fact that, when Dianthe is (re)introduced into Reuel and Aubrey’s circle of friends, they alone recognize her as the Fisk singer who had performed for the community not long before. This coupled with her mysterious disappearance after her performance with the Fisk singers lend her an ephemeral quality, an aspect of immateriality that allows her to slip in and out of two worlds. In this sense, Dianthe’s hysteria signals a physical manifestation of her repressed black subjectivity, the violent splitting of the self that is the legacy of the amalgamation of the races as a result of the systematic rape of black women by white men.

The Marrow of Tradition

In Charles Chesnut’s *The Marrow of Tradition*, hysteria manifests not in a biracial woman but in her white sister. The novel depicts both the individual neurosis and the violent social pathology of racism. Chesnut fictionally presents the November 10, 1898 massacre of African Americans in Wilmington, North Carolina

⁹⁵ Hopkins, p. 568.

⁹⁶ Hopkins, p. 568.

through the story of two interconnected families who reside in the city of “Wellington”: the Millers, an upwardly mobile middle-class African American family, and the Carterets, an old-money white family in financial decline after the Civil War. As in the novels of Harper and Hopkins, Chestnut’s work reveals the way in which both the myth of the black rapist and the social construction of white womanhood functioned to legitimize racial violence such as the lynching and massacring of black men. These acts of violence, according to Samina Najimi, often served to sever ties between African American civil rights activists and women’s rights activists as a result in large part of white male anxiety over loss of political and social power.⁹⁷ Indeed, in the novel, the massacre is sparked by the murder of a wealthy white woman, Polly Ochiltree; Polly is killed by a white man, her grand-nephew Tom Delamere, who sets up his grandfather’s black servant, Sandy Campbell, by committing the murder in blackface. Major Cateret’s newspaper intensifies the backlash to the murder by encouraging vigilante justice in order to protect white womanhood. The massacre, as with that in Wilmington, finally culminates as a result of the publication of an article that counters the stereotype of the black male rapist by suggesting white women often freely engage in sexual relations with black men.⁹⁸

The Miller family and the Carteret family appear to be mirror images of each other. As Bryan Wagner argues in his article, “Charles Chesnut and the Epistemology of Racial Violence,” the juxtaposition of the two families throughout

⁹⁷ Samina Najimi, “Janet, Polly, and Olivia: Constructs of Blackness and White Femininity in Charles Chestnut’s *The Marrow of Tradition*,” *The Southern Literary Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (1999).

⁹⁸ Like Harper and Hopkins, Chestnut employs the strategy of alluding to actual events and contemporary public figures in his novel. The author of the article that sparked the Wilmington riot was Alexander manly, who was responding to a piece by Rebecca Felton supporting lynching.

the novel creates “disturbances of vision” that erode white identity, which is predicated on the violent differentiation from a black Other.⁹⁹ This mirroring, similar to the splitting or doubling of the self that occurs in *Of One Blood*, is perhaps most pronounced in the novel’s estranged sisters, Olivia and Janet; the first, white and legitimate, the second, black and unrecognized, their chance encounters shake the foundation of Olivia’s identity and literally make her sick. It is precisely this exposure of the bare bones of the Carteret family that drives Olivia into an hysterical fit. Olivia sees herself reflected in the body a black woman; as Jane describes the two women, “dis yer Janet...is ez much like her ez ef dey wuz twins. Folks sometimes takes ’em fer one ernudder.”¹⁰⁰ The hysterical attack, then, is not only the result of the shock of kinship between the two women, but also of a crisis of racial subjectivity. However, as opposed to Harper’s and Hopkins’s novels, it is a crisis experienced by a white woman in response to her literal perception of the slipperiness between white and black racial identities.

The Marrow of Tradition opens with the authoritative and authorizing voice of the white family doctor instructing Major Carteret to remain by his wife’s bedside while the doctor rests. Olivia, the major’s wife, had “suffered from a nervous shock” that had sent her into early labor. Mammy Jane, who had been slave and then servant to the family beginning with Olivia’s mother, recounts to Doctor Price what caused Olivia’s nervous shock and, in the process, reveals Olivia’s kinship with Janet. Janet’s mother, Julia, had been the family’s housekeeper; upon her death, Elizabeth, Olivia’s

⁹⁹ Bryan Wagner, “Charles Chesnutt and the Epistemology of Racial Violence,” *American Literature* Vol. 73, No. 2 (2001).

¹⁰⁰ Chesnutt, p. 5.

mother, had asked her sister Polly to care for Olivia. Polly insisted Julia be let go as housekeeper, and when Olivia's father refused, Olivia went to live with Polly; eventually, Julia bore a child, Janet, to Olivia's father.¹⁰¹ Although Olivia's father, Samuel Merrell, secretly married Julia, as with Iola's parents Marie and Lester, Julia's ability to consent to such a relationship must be brought in to question. As with both *Iola Leroy* and *Of One Blood*, Chestnut's novel suggests the impossibility of consensual relations between black women and white men, as these relations were constrained by both the institutionalized practice of white male violence against black women and the legal code that protects white male privilege.

Olivia's anxiety over her own racial status is exacerbated by the fact that Janet is living in Olivia's husband's ancestral home with her husband, Dr. William Miller, and their son. This represents how whites' perception of the Civil War as a transfer of wealth from Southern white families to black families was a prime justification for violence against African Americans. A black family's inhabiting of a white family estate might have been understood as a violation of the white family, as the home is an intimate symbol of white aristocratic patriarchy. Janet's son also plays a role in the manifestation of Olivia's hysteria; she sees her illegitimate half sister with her son, "a fine-lookin' little yaller boy, w'at favors de fam'y so dat ef Mis' 'Livy'd see de chile anywhere, it'd mos' break her heart fer ter think 'bout her not havin' no child'en herse'f."¹⁰² Olivia immediately experiences a "fit er hysterics" upon seeing Janet with her child, as a result of her anxiety over her own pregnancy and her ability to

¹⁰¹ Interestingly, as Mammy Jane recites the exchange between Olivia's father and her aunt Polly, she enacts a sort of ventriloquism in which she speaks the parts of this bourgeois melodrama in dialect.

¹⁰² Chestnut, p. 6.

reproduce a (white) heir, as Olivia's childlessness is "the one cloud alone [that] has marred the otherwise perfect serenity of their happiness."¹⁰³ Although in Chestnut's novel, the "hysteric" is a white woman, hysteria still functions to disrupt dominant racial conventions about the body. That is, as in *Iola Leroy* and *Of One Blood*, hysteria operates to reveal the constructedness not only of white womanhood, but of whiteness and blackness more broadly.

Racial Medicine

In the fictional representations of hysteria in biracial women by Harper, Hopkins, and Chestnut, the curing of the illness reunites the black family, sometimes also restoring it to "health," as in *Iola Leroy*, and other times by exposing its sickness resulting from slavery's legacy of sexual violence and familial rupture, as in *Of One Blood*.¹⁰⁴ The family reunification that occurs in *Iola Leroy*, *Of One Blood*, and *The Marrow of Tradition* are all sparked by black physicians, a popular trope in the literature of the period.¹⁰⁵ The black doctor played a pivotal cultural role during the years after Reconstruction, as the increasing prominence and professionalization of the black medical community served as a means of expanding the black middle class. Black doctors, who were among the most educated African Americans in the post-Reconstruction period, were important figures in uplift campaigns, as both symbols of

¹⁰³ Chestnut, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ By "sickness" here I refer to the incest that is revealed at the end of the novel, which I read as a result not of the shared lineage of blackness, but of the three characters' shared whiteness, and the history of violence and sexual abuse embedded in that genetic heritage.

¹⁰⁵ I intend "the black physician" to be read as male. I have not encountered any representations of black women physicians, although according to Todd Savitt, four women enrolled at Meharry Medical College in 1893. Todd Savitt, *Race and Medicine in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century America* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University, 2007).

the capacity of African Americans to achieve racial progress and as vehicles for uplift through improving health conditions for black people. Black physicians were counted among the “talented tenth” in that they represented both the bourgeois and masculine values championed by uplift campaigns. The medical profession gave black men access to knowledge about the body as well as the power to shape how the black body in particular was understood and studied, power that had had been collectively denied African Americans for centuries. This knowledge and authority enabled African Americans to respond to racialized medical models predicated on the belief that innate differences between black and white bodies made them differently susceptible to disease. For instance, illness in black men and women was often attributed to weaker or more degraded physical constitutions. In this way, then, the trope of the black physician within African American literature was central discursive element of biofuturity, as the figure united uplift campaigns with cultural production. African American authors used the trope of the black doctor to reimagine an improved racial future through a medically improved black body, thereby countering a eugenic view of the black body as inferior.

In a 1916 article by Kelly Miller, the African American sociologist, Miller declares that “during the entire history of the race on this continent, there has been no more striking indication of its capacity for self-reclamation and of its ability to maintain a professional class on the basis of scientific efficiency than the rise and success of the Negro physician.”¹⁰⁶ To be sure, black physicians played a central role

¹⁰⁶ Kelly Miller, “The Historic Background of the Negro Physician,” *The Journal of Negro History* Vol. 1, No. 2 (1916), p. 109.

in African American communities; however, it was a contradictory and complicated one. As Susan L. Smith has documented in *Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired*, beginning in the 1890s, African Americans increasingly began to associate the struggle for improved health conditions with the broader struggle for civil rights.¹⁰⁷

Prior to the Civil War, white physicians provided medical care to slaves at the expense of slave owners. During the war, many white Southern physicians enlisted, which halted medical system in the South, with medical journals suspending publication and medical schools closing their doors.¹⁰⁸ As a result, after the war, fewer white physicians resided in the South, and those who remained were often harassed and threatened by white racists for treating black patients. The medical profession itself had come to be less lucrative in the South as well, as slaveholders no longer paid doctors to care for their slaves. Freed people's lack of financial resources made health care difficult if not impossible to access.¹⁰⁹ Black medical students were enticed to the profession by the promise of improving the health and well-being of the race while boosting their own financial and social position; however, the reality of their work was quite different. The racial politics of the era made it difficult for them to take on the uplift mission of racial betterment by expanding good health practices to poorer black communities. Black physicians often lacked financial resources as they transitioned from medical school to medical practice, the poor black patients that were most

¹⁰⁷ Susan L. Smith, *Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired: Black Women's Health Activism in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995). Smith work is a fascinating recovery of black women's health activism, which unfortunately is outside the scope of this chapter.

¹⁰⁸ Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave: Motherhood and Medicine in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: MA Harvard University Press, 2006).

¹⁰⁹ Schwartz cites a former slave interviewed in the 1930s, who, when asked to describe the difference between slavery and freedom, "noted that under freedom people paid for medical care but under slavery owners assumed responsibility for the doctor's bill," p. 301.

common to their practice were often reluctant to use their services, and white doctors frequently excluded them from professional communities.¹¹⁰

Miles Vandahurst Lynk (named for the first two bishops of Colored Methodist Episcopal Church) was perhaps one of the most eclectic examples of the black physician during the post-Reconstruction period. Lynk founded *The Medical and Surgical Observer*, the first black medical journal, on December 1, 1892, when he was just twenty-one years old physician and had completed medical school only a year and a half earlier. The *MSO* was published for only a little more than a year, but during its run, it connected black health professionals, including physicians, dentists, and pharmacists.¹¹¹ As black physicians were often barred from joining medical societies and practicing at white hospitals, and thus from engaging in medical, professional, and social dialogue, Lynk's publication offered an alternative support system for the emerging black medical community. His other endeavors include cofounding a national medical organization; founding and running a medical school; writing and editing a magazine for African Americans on black history, literature, and culture; establishing a publishing house to print and sell books and magazines; and eventually obtaining a law degree and opening a law school for African Americans.¹¹² Although the periodical never openly took on issues of race, it did construct a representation of the black physician by featuring lead articles written by black physicians and highlighted news regarding people in the black medical community or about the medical schools. For instance, all 24 of the "Original Communications" pieces were

¹¹⁰ Savitt, *Race and Medicine in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century America*.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

written by black physicians, and of the 15 authors of the central articles in the journal, all were graduates of preeminent black medical schools.¹¹³ The journal thus offered a space for African Americans to negotiate the meaning of illness and health in their community. More overtly, it offered biographical sketches of black doctors, for instance, J. T. Walton of San Antonio, Texas. The piece on Walton opens by remarking that “in presenting the face of Dr. J. T. Walton to the many readers of the *Observer* we feel that we hold up before their gaze a worthy young physician.”¹¹⁴ Interestingly, the ‘face’ upon which the article suggests its readers should “gaze” is very light skinned. Thus, while the *MSO* offered a space to negotiate both the representations of the black body and the representation of the black physician, it also tended to represent the black physician as biracial, much like the fiction of the period.

The problems black physicians faced in the post-Reconstruction period are echoed in the novels under study here, as novelists such as Harper, Hopkins, and Chestnutt understood that science and medicine were prime cultural arenas for the contestation of the meaning of race. For instance, in *Iola Leroy*, Dr. Frank Latimer, a light-skinned African American physician encounters Dr. Gresham, Iola’s white suitor, and Dr. Latrobe, a Southern racist, at a medical convention in Philadelphia.¹¹⁵ Dr. Latrobe mistakes Latimer for white (Harper describes Latimer as having a

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ *Medical and Surgical Observer*, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 12.

¹¹⁵ In *Activist Sentiments*, Foreman argues that Lewis Howard Latimer and his father, George Latimer are the fictional Dr. Latimer’s homonymic referents. George Latimer posed as his pregnant wife’s master in 1842 to escape slavery prior to the birth of their first child. When he was threatened with being returned to the South and to slavery, George became a “cause célèbre.” Lewis, the couple’s youngest child, was something of a Renaissance man: he “played the flute and violin, painted portraits, and spoke French and German. He presented his poetry regularly at the Bethel Lyceum meetings, and also published it in the *New York Age*....By the 1890s, Latimer was a well established inventor,” p. 107.

“blonde” complexion), and Harper only reveals his biracial identity to readers at the same time Latimer reveals himself to Latrobe. Harper uses Latrobe’s—and the reader’s—ignorance of Latimer’s racial identity to undermine eugenic discourse regarding the supposedly science-verified inferiority of African Americans and to counter racist logic that presupposed the visibility of race. During the medical conference, Latrobe reiterates, specifically, that the absorption of black bodies into the American body politic will signal the decline of American civilization. However, Latimer, while passing for white, responds that it is Southern white men who began the literal absorption of black blood into white through the rape of black women. After Latimer delivers a paper at the conference, Latrobe remarks that he “is a very talented young man” and that his talent was a result of “heredity and environment.” Latimer, however, reveals his racial identity, and Dr. Gresham emphasizes that “he belongs to that negro race by blood and by choice.”¹¹⁶ The son of a slave and her master, Latimer’s paternal grandmother had offered to adopt him as her legitimate heir if he would consent to renounce his black identity and, subsequently, his black family. However, he refuses to “forsake his mother’s race,” and instead is committed to returning to racial uplift work in the South. Thus Latimer’s racial ambiguity challenges the scientific racism of eugenics and undermines racial classification, ironically through the testimony of a representative of medical science, an expert on the body.

In *Of One Blood*, Dr. Reuel Briggs is more overtly excluded from the medical profession. He too passes for white, although more deliberately than Latimer. He

¹¹⁶ Harper, *Iola Leroy*, p. 238.

conceals his racial identity from his white medical school colleagues, yet his racial subjectivity remains suspect: “It was rumored at first that he was of Italian birth, then they ‘guessed’ he was a Japanese, but whatever land claimed him as a son, all voted him a genius in his scientific studies, and much was expected of him at graduation.”¹¹⁷ Reuel’s passing has allowed him to advance in his profession despite his poverty and his suspect origins—“even a few of his articles had produced a profound impression.”¹¹⁸ Indeed, in Reuel is the fulfillment of James’ vision of a mystico-medical union, in which the study of natural and supernatural phenomena coexist. Like Harper, Hopkins also employs “histotextual” strategies by lifting passages verbatim from James’s science of hysteria in “The Hidden Self,” to craft a fictional narrative from contemporary medical discourse. She even titles the book Reuel is reading in the opening scene “The Unclassified Residuum,” a term James uses in the first sentence of his article. Thus, Reuel’s genius might be understood as a product of his mastery of both Western medicine and the African occult, as he is a close student of what might Hopkins calls “absurdities of supernatural phenomena or *mysticism*.”¹¹⁹ It is precisely from his repressed racial identity that he has acquired the mysticism that makes him a medical cause célèbre: “He remembered his mother well. From her he had inherited his mysticism and his occult powers.”¹²⁰ Thus, it is his African blood that endows him with the capacity to challenge established medical conventions and thereby bring Dianthe back to life. However, his mysticism, despite its proven

¹¹⁷ Hopkins, p. 444.

¹¹⁸ Hopkins, p. 444.

¹¹⁹ Hopkins, p. 444, p. 442.

¹²⁰ Hopkins, p. 558.

capacity to heal, is marginal and mistrusted by his peers. Ultimately, despite the reputation Reuel builds as a result of restoring Dianthe and expanding the boundaries of medicine, he is repeatedly denied employment, sabotaged by Aubrey who knows the secret of his biracial identity. As an “outed” black physician, his work is devalued and dismissed. Unlike Dr., Latimer and Dr. Miller, Hopkins suggests that there is no place for the black professional class in the U.S. Reuel must ultimately rediscover his African self and locate his impulse for racial uplift outside the confines of the U.S., on his journey to Africa, on which he ironically embarks as a result of his failed attempt to secure employment.

In Chesnutt’s *The Marrow of Tradition*, Janet’s husband, William Miller, is a black doctor who returns to Wellington to open a hospital and nursing school. Like many of the actual black physicians of the period, Miller returns to the South to engage in service to his race: “But his people had needed him, and he had wished to help them, and had sought by means of this institution to contribute to their uplifting.”¹²¹ Miller’s experience as a physician is distinguished from that of Dr. Latimer or Reuel by his darker features, which do not allow him to pass within his medical community. He is described as “black, or, more correctly speaking, brown; it was even a light brown, but both his swarthy complexion and his curly hair revealed what has been described in the laws of some of our states as a ‘visible admixture’ of African blood....[T]he mulatto’s erect form, broad shoulders, clear eyes, fine teeth, and pleasingly moulded features showed nowhere any sign of that degeneration which the

¹²¹ Chesnutt, p. 33.

pessimist so sadly maintains is the inevitable heritage of mixed races.¹²² While the light skin of Dr. Latimer and Reuel contest the boundaries of whiteness, it also facilitates the doctors' entry into the medical profession; that is, they look like doctors because they look white. Dr. Miller, on the other hand, as a visibly black man, serves a disruptive force in the community despite his intention of uplifting the black residents. As Wagner argues, Chestnut's novel foregrounds the way in which the black middle class "disrupts protocols of racial visibility" and triggers the white violence that attempts to turn their world "right side up." That is, Miller and his family, unlike Dr. Latimer and Iola or Reule, Dianthe, and Aubrey, are visibly marked by their race, which disturbs the Southern social order as they occupy a subjugated racial position but a privileged class position. Perhaps the most abhorrent offense to the Southern whites of Wellington is the Millers' purchase of the old-moned, white Carteret's familial estate, which Dr. Miller transforms into a black hospital. As the Southern social order was predicated on the violent abuse of the black body, the hospital, a symbol of the health and revitalization of the black body placed precisely on the site of slavery, signals the possibility for restructuring the South so as to privilege the care and nurturing of African Americans. In the eyes of Southern whites, however, this transformation represents a transfer of social, economic, and political capital from whites to blacks, and erupts in a violent riot that ends with the death of many African Americans and the destruction of the hospital.

Black Physicians Make Good Husbands

¹²² Chestnut, p. 32.

The figure of the black physician might also be understood as posing a challenge to racial boundaries by contesting the definitions of whiteness, thereby overtly claiming white women as politically and legally black. Specifically, in *Iola Leroy* and *Of One Blood*, the romantic pairing of black doctors and biracial women by these authors challenges white, middle-class perceptions of black women, in particular their bodies and their sexuality. In this sense, the overtly white characters of Iola Leroy and Dianthe Luske become biologically black in conjunction with their relationships with black physicians—and in fact, Dianthe literally shifts from inhabiting a white to a black body. The hysteria these biracial female characters experience, then, as a result of their suppressed racial subjectivity, is cured during the course of the women’s relationships with black physicians. This narrative strategy is also part of a larger uplift campaign to counter the social pressure to “pass” by positing race as a choice for biracial people, and by insisting that to choosing blackness is a commitment to an improved racial future.

Family separation and reconstruction is central to *Iola Leroy*, *Of One Blood*, and *The Marrow of Tradition*. Indeed, Harper opens *Iola Leroy* with a description of Robert Johnson (who is later revealed to be Marie’s brother and thus Iola’s uncle) that emphasizes this underlying theme: the first characteristic attributed to Robert is that he “had been separated from his mother in his childhood and reared by his mistress as a favorite slave.”¹²³ The separation of children from their mothers characterizes the experience of slavery, and Harper populates the opening three chapters of the text with tales of divided families. Often slave women were sold away from their children

¹²³ Harper, *Iola Leroy*, p. 7.

when the slave mistress realized her husband had fathered the children. Harper heavily implies this scenario was what led to Robert's separation from his mother. Robert Johnson is the namesake of the plantation master, and the shared name suggests his paternity. As her "favorite," Mrs. Johnson had taught Robert to read, and Robert declares he "got nothing 'gainst my ole Miss, except she sold my mother from me. And a boy ain't nothin' without his mother."¹²⁴ While his rather intimate relationship with Mrs. Johnson suggests she recognized in some way her kinship to Robert, Robert rejects his white surrogate.¹²⁵ His manhood, defined in terms of racial service and bourgeois morality, is predicated on his blackness, which he only has knowledge of and access to through his mother.

Although not as overt as in *Of One Blood*, anxiety over incest lurks in the shadows of *Iola Leroy*. Indeed, one might read the subtitle of the novel, "Shadows Uplifted," as an allusion to the shadows of unknown parentage, which disperse upon the reunification of the family. For instance, when Iola encounters Robert while they are both serving with the Union army, they might easily have engaged in a romantic relationship. Iola, however, vows not to wed until she has located her mother. By postponing marriage until she has rediscovered her family genealogy, she prevents the tragedy of incest that accompanies the dispersed, amalgamated, and secreted family histories born of slavery. Ultimately, as in *Of One Blood*, kinship is read on the body. While throughout *Iola Leroy*, the protagonists, Robert, Iola, and her brother, Harry, are all encouraged to pass for white, they repeatedly identify themselves as black, as

¹²⁴ Harper, *Iola Leroy*, p. 19.

¹²⁵ In *Activist Sentiments*, Foreman reads a sexual relationship between Robert and Mrs. Johnson.

passing for white would make recognition of and reunification with their family (each other) more difficult, if not impossible. Familial recognition is accomplished through distinctive marks on the body: Robert knows his sister by the mole on her cheek, and Marie knows her brother by the red spot on his temple. This family reconstruction through the recognition of intimate physical details of a body suggests a distinction between the visibility of race and that of kin. The repudiation of racial identity through passing, the novel suggests, undermines the visibility of family ties and allows for the possibility of incest.

The family reconstruction culminates in Iola's choice of two suitors. The first, white Dr. Gresham, Iola encounters after she is freed by the Union army and enlisted as a nurse to care for Union soldiers. She is soon the object of desire of the white physician, who believes she is also white.¹²⁶ When Dr. Gresham learns her true racial identity,—“A woman as white as she a slave?”—he offers to marry her and take her North, with the condition that she renounce her black identity and live as a white woman. Iola, like her uncle, rejects the possibility of passing; she “would never enter a family where she would be an unwelcome member” and refuses to live under a “shadow of concealment.”¹²⁷ She declines Dr. Gresham's offer, opting instead to commit herself to service to her race. Although Iola declares her intention to serve her race as a black woman, her uplift work is sporadic, as her health is still fragile as a result of her ordeal. As she is preparing to return to teaching, she is courted by Dr.

¹²⁶ In *Reconstructing Womanhood*, Carby describes Iola as physically meeting “the requirements of acceptable standards of womanhood. She was beautiful, fair, and virtuous yet not compliant or passive,” p. 74.

¹²⁷ Harper, *Iola Leroy*, p. 117.

Latimer, who is treating her mother's illness. Dr. Latimer admonishes her that her "devotion to study and work is too intense" and that "as a teacher [she] will need strong health and calm nerves." He goes on to prescribe for her "change of air, change of scene, and change of name"—what Iola calls the "faith cure," a playful allusion to the S. Weir Mitchell "rest cure."¹²⁸ Yet, ultimately, what Iola is prescribed, and what Harper suggests as a cure for Iola's hysteria, is a healthy marriage—that is, a marriage to a black man, light skinned though he may be. In choosing Dr. Latimer, Iola opts not to live "under a shadow of concealment," but rather chooses a black identity, a black family, and a role in shaping the black community. As Ann duCille argues, Harper employs this coupling convention to subvert the dominant construct of black womanhood as hypersexual and promiscuous. African American authors such as Harper married off their black heroines to claim recognition for a black womanhood that demanded equal treatment received by white women. Unlike her parents' secreted and shadowy relationship in which her mother's racial identity was concealed, Iola's relationship with Dr. Latimer is racially "compatible." Through this relationship, Harper puts forth a vision of black biofuturity in which racial uplift is achieved through open and consensual familial relations.

Like *Iola Leroy*, family reconstruction is central to the plot of *Of One Blood*. The characters Reuel, Dianthe, and Aubrey must rediscover their racial histories obscured by the legacy of slavery. Unlike Harper's novel, where the reunification of Iola's family occurs at a church meeting of broken families, in Hopkins' novel, the

¹²⁸ Harper, *Iola Leroy*, p. 270. For a more in-depth discussion of Mitchell's rest cure, see Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

family is reunited through their connection with the spiritual world, a connection they inherited from their mother and grandmother. As Reuel prophesies early in the novel, “the wonders of a material world cannot approach those of the undiscovered country within ourselves—the hidden self lying quiescent in every human soul.”¹²⁹ Aubrey, Dianthe, and Reuel must discover their “hidden selves,” the secret of their racial origins, in order to uncover their familial connection. While also challenging polygenic claims of the multiple genetic origins of the human species, “of one blood” emphasizes the cultural and social danger posed by the secreted and coercive racial mixing that has obscured white and black family ties. Hopkins’ text disputes the assumption that black blood is visible, and asserts that incest is the consequence of the veiling of racial mixture. The three protagonists, Dianthe, Reuel, and Aubrey, do not recognize their kinship bond as they lack knowledge of their racial genealogies. It is the legacy of slavery, Hopkins suggests, that threatens to undermine social relations by violating the central cultural taboo of incest. The hidden self of American identity, then, is the suppressed unconscious knowledge of the history of rape and miscegenation, a history that unravels any notion of racial purity and confounds the myth of whiteness. Interestingly, as in *Iola Leroy*, it is a physical mark on the body that signals the family relation between Dianthe, Reuel, and Aubrey, suggesting that the undiscovered self behind the veil of their American identity is not simply blackness but rather the repressed consciousness of the history of racial violence, and in conjunction, the repressed kinship between black and white Americans. In *Of One Blood*, the figure of the lotus flower reunites the family, yet only after the violation of

¹²⁹ Hopkins, p. 448.

the incest taboo. As in Harper's *Iola Leroy*, Hopkins challenges the popular notion that black and biracial people exemplified racial degradation; rather, she asserts that it is the degradation of white slave culture that has produced a legacy of crossed bloodlines through multigenerational, intra-familial rape.

Reuel discovers his secret self while he is in the literally undiscovered country of the lost Ethiopian city of Telassar. Reuel's suppression of his blackness manifests in neurasthenia, a nervous condition defined as "self-consciousness as a sickness, an illness that alienates the self from others."¹³⁰ Reuel's self-conscious nervousness is a product in part of his anxiety that his body will betray his racial secret. His physical features are described as follows: "The nose was the aristocratic feature, although nearly spoiled by broad nostrils, of this remarkable young man; his skin was white, but of a tint suggesting olive, an almost sallow color, which is a mark of strong, melancholic temperaments."¹³¹ Thus Reuel's physical traits, although dominantly white, suggest racial mixture; his "sallow" or yellow color and his "broad nostrils" hint at miscegenation. In this sense, Hopkins seems to be challenging dominant notions of nervous diseases such as hysteria and neurasthenia as the result of the "overcivilization" of middle-class whites, suggesting instead that they are symptoms of a larger social crisis over repressed racial histories. Indeed, in conversation with Aubrey, Reuel reveals his nervousness over the visibility of his racial identity by suddenly asking, "Aubrey, I look natural don't I? There is nothing about me that seems wrong?" Aubrey, although Reuel's brother, is described as having fair hair and

¹³⁰ Lutz, *American Nervousness*, 1903, p. 125.

¹³¹ Hopkins, p. 443-4.

blue eyes; Reuel almost divines that Aubrey too possesses a “secret self.” Reuel “gazed admiringly at the handsome face turned up to the ceiling and gazing with soft caressing eyes at the ugly whitewashed wall through rings of curling smoke. ‘Yet you have a greater gift of duality than I,’” Reuel dreamily murmurs to Aubrey. The description of the wall as “whitewashed” foreshadows the revelation of Aubrey’s identity at the end of the novel, as he too has been “whitewashed” as a result of being switched at birth with a white baby. Reuel’s suggestion that Aubrey has the greater gift of duality alludes to Aubrey deception—his love for Dianthe and his plot to murder both Reuel and his own fiancée—as well as his suppressed racial identity.

Dianthe’s hysterical amnesia can be read as a metaphor for her suppressed racial subjectivity as well as the larger cultural amnesia about the interfamilial legacies of slavery. Incest is the secreted progeny of the institution of slavery, a product of the rape and abuse of slave women by white men. This history is relived through Dianthe, who learns at the end that the two men she is married to are both her brothers. Like Iola, Dianthe marries the black physician who is treating her nervous disorder. However, Reuel, unlike Dr. Latimer, is still passing for white when they marry, and thus conceals Dianthe’s own racial identity from her. Reuel’s betrayal enables her manipulation by Aubrey, who is also in love with her and contrives to send Reuel off to Africa. When Dianthe’s voice returns, so does her memory of her racial identity; Aubrey deceives her into believing he is the only one who knows her true identity, and that Reuel would leave her if he were to discover her secret. Aubrey thus reenacts the coercive sexual relations of slavery: “In vain the girl sought to throw off the numbing influence of the man’s presence. In desperation she tried to defy him, but she knew

that she had lost her will power and was but a puppet in the hands of this false friend.”¹³² Dianthe succumbs to the sexual coercion of Aubrey, what Gillman calls “a postbellum recapitulation of the sexual violence done to her female forebears.”¹³³

Dianthe’s vulnerability, like Iola’s, is linked not only to her blackness but to her ignorance of her racial identity. The sexual violence Dianthe experiences at the hands of these “white” men alludes to not only the sexual control of slave owners over slave women, but of doctors over the bodies of slave women.

The shock of kinship revealed at the novel’s end is foreshadowed by Aubrey’s account of his father’s “experiments” on a slave woman on his plantation. Aubrey’s father, also a physician, “was deeply interested in the science of medicine, and . . . made some valuable discoveries along the line of mesmeric phenomena, for some two or three of his books are referred to even at this advanced stage of discovery, as marvelous in some of their data.”¹³⁴ One of the slave women on which he experimented is Mira, who is Aubrey and Reuel’s mother, herself a mystic who inherited her powers from her mother, Hannah, “the most noted ‘voodoo’ doctor or witch in the country.”¹³⁵ Aubrey Sr., this suggests, might have actually learned his mesmerism from his slaves, relocating the source of “valuable” medical discoveries from the experimenter to the object of experimentation. This representation of the Southern physician experimenting on slave women recalls J. Marion Sims, the “father of gynecology,” and his experiments on slave women. Because of social and cultural

¹³² Hopkins, p. 504.

¹³³ Gillman, p. 59

¹³⁴ Hopkins, p. 486.

¹³⁵ Hopkins, p. 603.

codes that limited the types of examination that could be undertaken with white women, Sims tested many of his early devices and procedures on slave women, including the speculum (using a pewter spoon).¹³⁶ Sims is most famous for his development of a treatment for fistula, a reproductive disorder that inhibited women from working or getting pregnant. Antebellum Southern law did not recognize marital rights between enslaved men and women, allowing masters to manage their intimate relations. Indeed, when the transatlantic slave trade ended, the domestic reproduction of slaves became a necessity for plantation economies. The sexual manipulation and exploitation of black women's bodies was often conducted by white physicians in the service of slaveholders. Doctors cooperated with slaveholders to manage the reproductive life of slave women, including conception, pregnancy, and childbirth, according to the desires of the master.

At the bidding of neighboring slaveholders who wanted to "fix" their slaves so they could continue to labor and reproduce, Sims performed at least 30 surgeries on three slave women over a period of four years before finally developing a procedure to repair the fistula. The inhumane treatment of slave women was justified by the view that black and white women were radically different from each other, in part because black women were viewed as genetically better able to bear pain and as more durable as a result of their "domestication" as slaves. This also allowed doctors to experiment publicly on black women and on poor white women, something that bourgeois

¹³⁶ For compelling histories of J. Marion Sims, see G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Horrors of the Half-Known Life: Male Attitudes Toward Women and Sexuality in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Terri Kapsalis, *Public Privates: Performing Gynecology From Both Ends of the Speculum* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); and Nelson, *National Manhood*.

ideology prohibited for middle-class white women. In *Of One Blood*, both Mira and her daughter Dianthe undergo public experiments by their physician lovers. Aubrey Sr. often placed Mira in a trance in order to entertain his guests. However, in the midst of one such trance, Mira's submerged personality prophesies the defeat of the South in the Civil War, a subversive pronouncement that disrupts the power dynamic of slave and master. Indeed, her prediction sends the dinner party into a panic and affects her master to such an extent that he sells her. This incident, as recounted by Aubrey, speaks to the power and possibility of resistance by slave women. Dianthe is also publicly experimented on by Reuel, who examines and treats her lifeless body while a crowd of doctors observes his unorthodox methods. As Reuel is preparing to reanimate her, "he stood for some seconds gazing down on Dianthe; every nerve quivered, every pulse of his body throbbed."¹³⁷ Reuel, this scene suggests, receives an erotic charge from the power he has over her lifeless, limp body. Both of these scenes draw on the history of sexual and medical coercion and manipulation of black women's bodies by white men to argue for open and consensual relations between black men and women, as a way to overcome the moral corruption and violence of slavery.

Because Reuel conceals both his own and Dianthe's racial identity, their marriage is not the uplifting union in the service of racial progress, as is Iola's marriage to Dr. Latimer. Yet Reuel and Dianthe have a metaphysical connection, and their encounter is required for the fulfillment of their racial destinies as descendents of African royalty. Although it is Dianthe who is immobilized by hysterical amnesia and

¹³⁷ Hopkins, p. 464.

trances, both she and Reuel share a psychic connection that links their suppressed black selves. Before they meet, Dianthe visits Reuel in visions more than once, and when Reuel awakens her from suspended animation, Dianthe immediately recognizes Reuel, telling him she dreamed of him while she slept. Reuel confesses to Aubrey, “I am an instrument—how I know not—a child of circumstances. Do you not perceive something strange in this case?”¹³⁸ When Aubrey asks him to explain himself, Reuel reveals that “it is a *dual* mesmeric trance!” This suggests that both Dianthe and Reuel—and perhaps even Aubrey—the children of peculiar circumstances, are being manipulated by a force beyond their control. This force is most likely their mother, Mira, who visits them both supernaturally and quite possibly is the female mesmerist Dianthe encounters after her visit to Boston with the Fisk singers. This encounter sets the events in motion by initiating the “dual trance” that reunites the family and ultimately takes both Reuel and Dianthe back to Africa. While Reuel is figuratively reborn as the descendant of a line of African kings, forcing him to confront his black identity, Dianthe is very literally reunited with her black self through her rebirth as Queen Candace. For although she seems to die at the end, Dianthe actually is physically transformed into the black, virgin queen who is “fit” to marry Reuel. Hopkins offers hints throughout the text that there is a connection between the two women: both women are characterized as Venus, although Queen Candace is described as a “Venus in Bronze”; they are physically and facially identical; and Candace’s voice is even that of Dianthe! Dianthe and the Ethiopian princess, then, are doubles. While Dianthe is dying, “she knew that her spiritual person must survive the

¹³⁸ Hopkins, p. 471.

grave.”¹³⁹ Indeed, Hopkins suggests early on that consciousness is possible beyond the body; as Reuel prepares to revive Dianthe early in the novel, the narrator reflects, “Death! There is no death. Life is everlasting, and from its reality can have no end.”¹⁴⁰ As she passes from one world to the next, Dianthe hears the “welcome of ancient Ethiopia.”¹⁴¹ Dianthe, then, a “ruined temple,” is called home to her rightful place as virgin queen, to relive the history that was denied her and her brothers as a result of slavery.

The narrative tension remains unresolved by the end of the novel, which suggests that social contradictions that stem from the institution of slavery cannot be easily resolved within the U.S. borders—that slavery is a transnational problem that requires a transnational solution.¹⁴² Thus, like Harper’s novel, *Of One Blood* engages with contemporary debates about the “race question,” although, unlike Harper’s, Hopkins’s vision of uplift explicitly connects black nationalism with Pan-Africanism.¹⁴³ Reuel’s expedition to Africa is a means for Hopkins to contest both the cultural and scientific racism that was legitimated through eugenic theories of racial difference and perpetuated socially and legally through Jim Crow. In this respect, Africa “embodies both the histories and future possibilities of black people.”¹⁴⁴ In the novel, Professor Stone, the leader of the expedition to the lost city of Meroe, is

¹³⁹ Hopkins, p. 613.

¹⁴⁰ Hopkins, p. 464.

¹⁴¹ Hopkins, p. 615.

¹⁴² Carby, “Introduction,” *Of One Blood*.

¹⁴³ As Carby notes, Pan-Africanism was an emerged as a political philosophy at the turn of the century with the convening of a Pan-African conference in London in 1900 by Henry Sylvester Williams, a West Indian who organized the conference in protest against European imperialism and to garner support for Africans fighting against colonialism. Carby, “Introduction.”

¹⁴⁴ Carby, “Introduction,” p. xliii.

searching for evidence that Ethiopia, as opposed to Europe, was in fact the “cradle of civilization,” and that “black was the original color of man.” This, Hopkins suggests, would “establish the primal existence of the Negro as the most ancient source of all that [Anglo-Saxons] value in modern life,” thus severing the discursive link between Western civilization and whiteness and staking a claim for Western civilization as racially inclusive.¹⁴⁵ Hopkins employs ethnology, anthropology, and Egyptology, a field where the popular and the academic merged, to refute dominant racial science that hierarchized the races, placing blacks at the bottom.¹⁴⁶ Harper employs the discourse of biofuturity to imagine a black racial future that builds directly upon an ancient foundation to counter the notion of the hereditary physical and mental inferiority of blacks. However, her work also reiterates the imperialist rhetoric of the civilizing mission, what Kevin Gaines dubs a “typical black American variation” of this theme that “was meant to enhance black Americans’ race pride, but at the expense of the autonomy of African peoples, whose cultures and histories remained a blank page for imaginary conquest.”¹⁴⁷ Africa and pan-African nationalism, then, function in the novel to challenge dominant discourses of race in the U.S. by positing black Americans as imperial agents of transnational black uplift, by literally wedding

¹⁴⁵ Hopkins, *Of One Blood*, p. 520.

¹⁴⁶ See Gillman, “Pauline Hopkins and the Occult” for a discussion of the pervasiveness of Egyptology in American popular culture. For instance, P.T. Barnum’s American Museum displayed exhibits on Egyptian relics.

¹⁴⁷ Kevin Gaines, “Black Americans’ Racial Uplift Ideology as ‘Civilizing Mission’: Pauline E. Hopkins on Race and Imperialism,” in *Cultures of U.S. Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 435. Gaines reads Hopkins’s series in *Voice of the Negro* as participating in two distinct imperialist programs. In her writings on the populations in the South Pacific, she advocates a civilizing mission of progress and uplift through Christianity, for which African Americans would serve as an example and model. However, she imagines an anti-imperialism solidarity between African Americans, Africans, and Japanese, races she evidently viewed as more “advanced” and more prepared to challenge European and American domination.

ancient African civilization with contemporary Christian culture. Thus while she imagines a racial future in which African Americans are revitalized through their contact with Africa, her vision employs problematic imperialist notions founded on white racist ideology.

The Ruined Hospital

Finally, in Chestnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition*, the violent white hysteria that erupts at the end of the novel results in the death and destruction of the black community in Welmington. The attack on the political body of the black community ironically takes place at the locus of care for the black body, the hospital, which of course, as the former Carteret estate, had been a seat of white supremacist power. The act of transforming the Carteret estate into a site of the institutionalization of care for the black body seems to designate the hospital as the heart of the racial tension within the community, particularly because it provides the location for the confrontation between Josh Green and Captain McBane. The white mob that arbitrates between the life and death of the black community of Welmington converges on the hospital, an institution that also arbitrates between life and death. Josh Green, the proletarian hero of the novel who embodies the raw physical power of black resistance to white racist violence, gathers together a "body of armed men" to resist the "crowds of white men and half-grown boys, drunk with whiskey or with license, [that] raged through the streets, beating, killing, or chasing any negro so unfortunate to fall into their hands."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Chestnutt, p. 193.

Josh leads the group of men to the hospital, in an effort “to protect their own”—the public institutions of the black community that included the school and church buildings. The men take possession of the deserted hospital, while the white mob surrounds the building. The “fever stage” of the mob violence cannot be deterred by Major Carteret, who although an instigator of the violence for political motives is appalled when it touches his personal life, for instance, when Mammy Jane is killed.

Ultimately, Cateret leaves the scene, renouncing his own responsibility, while the white mob burns the hospital, driving out and then shooting the men inside. The burning hospital “sober[s]” the mob, which “shortly afterwards dispersed. The flames soon completed their work, and this handsome structure, the fruit of old Adam Miller’s industry, the monument of his son’s philanthropy, a promise of good things for the future of the city, lay smouldering in ruins, a melancholy witness to the fact that our boasted civilization is but a thin veneer, which cracks and scales off at the first impact of primal passions.”¹⁴⁹ The Caterets’ attachment to their ancestral home is written out of this history; rather, the estate is credited to Adam Miller, which might be read as a sort of paean to the slave labor that functioned as the foundation for the wealth of the white Southern plantation-crats. What remains in the smoldering ashes of the hospital is both a legacy of black labor and industry, the skeleton that has undergirded American culture and that is briefly made visible, and the political and social future of the black community, endangered by the failure of reconstruction. The ruined hospital, a symbol of community health and social hygiene, signals the lack of

¹⁴⁹ Chestnutt, p. 200.

protection and care for black bodies in this precarious moment in which the state has, if not legitimated, passively agreed to ignore white racial violence.

The destruction of the hospital and the massacre of African Americans tears asunder the black community of Welmington, a wreckage that parallels that wrought to the white community by the Civil War. The losses experienced by Dr. Miller and Janet at the end of the novel—their son, their hospital—parallel the decline of the white Southern plantation elite, represented by the Carteret family in the opening pages of the novel. “Long ago, while yet a mere boy in years, he had come back from Appomattox to find his family, one of the oldest and proudest in the state, hopelessly impoverished by the war,—even their ancestral home swallowed up in the common ruin. His elder brother had sacrificed his life on the bloody altar of the lost cause, and his father, broken and chagrined, died not many years later.”¹⁵⁰ Carteret’s family’s demise is attributed to its defense of the “lost cause,” the system of plantation slavery, which has left white Southern patriarchy in a state of crisis. Carteret is, as the novel opens, the last of his line and without heir, although he “rescues his ancestral line from extinction,” both physical and social, through his wife Olivia’s reproductive body and familial money, respectively. Miller builds his career upon the ruins of the Carteret family: his father had purchased the Carteret estate and Miller transforms it into a black hospital and nursing school. However, by novel’s end, the hospital has burned, and it is Miller who is now in a state of ruin. He laments to Olivia: “My people lie dead upon the streets, at the hands of yours. The work of my life is in ashes,—and

¹⁵⁰ Chestnut, p. 1.

yonder, stretched out in death, lies my own child!”¹⁵¹ By paralleling the destruction of both the white plantation aristocracy and the emerging black uplift movement, Chestnutt suggests that without some mutual attempt at racial harmony, both black and white racial and social futures remain in jeopardy.

At the conclusion of the novel, Olivia desperately seeks out William Miller to plead with him to perform the necessary operation that will save her child’s life. Miller defers to his wife Janet to make the decision; as Najimi argues, this deferral suggests Chestnutt’s faith in the political power of white women. According to Najimi, “In Olivia Carteret’s hysteria and final desperation, . . . Chestnutt shows that the white woman’s own self-preservation depends upon her reconfiguration of her relationship to African Americans, in whose ‘othering’ she has historically colluded.”¹⁵² The encounter between Olivia and Janet over the life of Olivia’s son is the realization of familial recognition that has been displaced and evaded throughout the novel. Miller looks at Olivia and sees his wife: “A lady stood there, so near the image of his own wife, whom he had just left, that he was well-nigh startled. A little older, perhaps, a little the fairer of complexion, but with the same form, the same features, marked by the same wild grief. . . . Her long dark hair the counterpart of his wife’s.”¹⁵³ In their physical features as well as their grief they are mirror images, suggesting that they embody each other’s shadow or repressed selves.¹⁵⁴ Their lives resemble each other’s as much as do their bodies: both lost their mothers and were

¹⁵¹ Chestnutt, p. 210.

¹⁵² Najimi, p. 12.

¹⁵³ Chestnutt, p. 209.

¹⁵⁴ Joyce Pettis, “*The Marrow of Tradition*: Charles Chestnutt’s Novel of the South” *North Carolina Literary Review* Vol. 2, No. 1 (1994).

estranged from their father; both are educated; both have husbands who are leaders in their communities; and both are mothers to sons.¹⁵⁵ Through this encounter of the divided selves, Olivia must confront the underlying causes of her hysteria: her refusal to recognize the parallel side of her family, a family connected by the history of sexual violence of slavery. This refusal has perpetuated a cycle of dispossession of both Janet and her mother Julia from the social and family legitimacy, as well as financial inheritance, that marriage provides. During their confrontation, Olivia both calls Janet her sister and confesses to Janet, “You *are* my lawful sister. My father was married to your mother. You are entitled to his name, and to half his estate.”¹⁵⁶ The life of her child hanging in the balance, Olivia recognizes Janet’s power over her, and submits to it, acknowledging her and Janet’s familial and social equality. By making the survival of the white child contingent on a black doctor, Chestnutt seems to suggest that the black middle class is necessary to the future survival of the white middle class. And yet Janet’s rejection of her sister’s offer of recognition signals a retreat for Chestnutt. Janet “imperiously” replies, “I throw you back your father’s name, your father’s wealth, your sisterly recognition. I want none of them.”¹⁵⁷ Janet rejects the contingency of Olivia’s offer, but by doing so she relieves Olivia—and thus the white middle class more broadly—of the responsibility of recognizing black social equality. Their confrontation and reunification at the end of the novel is a synecdoche for a larger, national confrontation with the amalgamated racial histories of the nation resulting from the legacy of slavery, one which remains conditional and incomplete.

¹⁵⁵ Najmi.

¹⁵⁶ Chestnutt, p. 211.

¹⁵⁷ Chestnutt, p. 212.

Conclusion

The work of psychologists such as William James and psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud suggest that hysteria is a manifestation of repressed subjectivities, of the embodied contradictions of living on the color line. The characters I examine in *Iola Leroy*, *Of One Blood*, and *The Marrow of Tradition* must confront the history of sexual violence that is at the core of slavery, while recognizing their own secret, repressed racial selves. This repressed, racially amalgamated subjectivity undergirds U.S. national consciousness during this period, a consciousness challenged and expanded by black uplift movements. The cure for hysteria for both black and white women, these novels suggest, is predicated on the family, that is, both on compatible unions between African American men and women and on familial reconstructions. Harper's, Hopkins', and Chestnut's suggest that in order for both the black body and the black self to be improved, African Americans must know and confront their family histories. Their visions of uplift engage with eugenic discourses of racial degeneration and improvement, at the center of which is reproduction of both healthy black bodies and healthy black marriages. In this way, these three authors engage in the discursive project of biofuturity through their reimagining of a black individual and national subjectivity that is contingent on the rethinking of blackness and the black body. Only this deliberate and conscious act of black self-making, these works suggest, will enable the success of racial uplift.

Melancholy Genealogies: Reproducing the Dysgenic Family
in the Work of Edith Wharton and Edith Summers Kelley

In 1874, Robert Dugdale, a sociologist and member of the executive committee of the Prison Association of New York, was tasked with the inspection of the state's jails. Furnished with a survey that included questions on heredity, education, intelligence, income, and "probable fate" of the inmates, Dugdale interviewed prisoners in 13 jails. At a jail in Ulster County in eastern New York, he came across six inmates who shared a family connection. Dugdale dubbed this family "the Jukes," and adapted Galton's method to write a hereditarian family study.¹ He presented his initial findings in an 1874 report, which was published as *The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease and Heredity* in 1877. The book's popularity among social reformers as well as the general public influenced public policy on poverty, leading to increased institutionalization of "deviants" and eventually sterilization, and lent validity to eugenics among the reading public.² It also led directly to the increase in the number of eugenic family studies conducted. After the publication of *The Jukes*, more than a dozen other such studies of dysgenic families were published from 1877 to 1926.³ The studies were published in a range of venues, including as official

¹ Galton struck on the idea for *Hereditary Genius* from his experience as an undergraduate at Cambridge, where he noticed that students of the same surnames consistently made the honor role. See Nicole Hahn Rafter, ed., *White Trash: The Eugenic Family Studies 1877-1919* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988).

² Ibid.

³ I understand "dysgenic" to mean having a negative or degenerative effect on offspring through the inheritance of undesirable physical and mental traits. This is distinct from "eugenic," which is the

public policy reports, in policy periodicals such as *The Survey*, in academic research bulletins and journals such as the *American Journal of Sociology*, and as books whose publication was financed by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (these studies include Dugdale's *The Jukes* and Henry H. Goddard's *The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-mindedness*.)⁴ In *Revolt Against Civilization*, Lothrop Stoddard characterized these studies as “melancholy genealogies,” suggesting that poverty and its supposed correlates, feeble-mindedness, criminality, and sexual deviance, were disappointing the nation's genetic aspirations.

In the U.S., the eugenics movement crystallized around 1910, with the formation of the Eugenics Record Office (ERO) in Cold Springs Harbor, New York. The office was funded by a wealthy railroad widow, Mrs. E.H. Harriman, and directed by the leading American eugenicist, Charles B. Davenport, with the goal of conducting research on “cacogenic,” or “bad-gened,” families, although the organization also encouraged the general public to submit their own genealogical information for analysis. The ERO's funding by wealthy patrons such as Harriman allowed the organization to train eugenic field workers to survey rural families, resulting in seven published studies.⁵

attempt to improve the human population by increasing desirable hereditary traits through the control of reproduction.

⁴ Rafter. *The Hill Folk* and *The Nam Family* also attribute support to Rockefeller, and Davenport was director of the Department of Experimental Evolution for the Carnegie Institution of Washington.

⁵ Family studies produced by the ERO include Gertrude Davenport's “Hereditary Crime” (1907), Florence H. Danielson and Charles B. Davenport's, *The Hill Folk: Report on a Rural Community of Hereditary Defectives* (1912), Arthur Estabrook and Davenport's *The Nam Family* (1912), Estabrook's *The Jukes in 1915* (1916), and Estabrook and Ivan McDougale's *Mongrel Virginians* (1926). The ERO also produced hundreds of other, unpublished studies of “dysgenic” families between 1910 and 1918. See Daylanne English, *Unnatural Selections: Eugenics in American Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

Beginning with Davenport's *The Hill Folk* in 1912, the studies became increasingly embedded in a discourse of negative eugenics by advocating for the prevention of dysgenic reproduction through birth control and sterilization. By this time, several states had begun to enact sterilization laws; in fact, from 1907 to 1930, 24 states enacted statutes permitting the compulsory sterilization of the so-called feeble-minded. From 1907 and into the 1960s, the state performed at least 60,00 sterilizations for eugenic reasons. By 1916, a national birth control campaign was underway, led by Margaret Sanger. Sanger, along with her sister Ethel Byrne, and Fania Mindell, opened the first birth control clinic in the U.S. on October 16, 1916, where they primarily provided diaphragms to poor and working-class women. The clinic was open for less than a month before all three women were arrested and jailed for violating the anti-obscenity Comstock Law, passed in 1873, which defined birth control as "obscene." While Sanger has been regarded as a feminist hero by the mainstream feminist movement, she had strong ties to the eugenic movement, and employed the rhetoric of national degeneration to advance the cause of legalized birth control.

In this chapter, I read both Edith Wharton's novel *Summer* and Edith Summers Kelley's novel *Weeds* as literary "case studies" of rural, dysgenic families perceived as unfit for reproduction. As Nicole Hahn Rafter observes in *White Trash*, her compilation of several of the eugenic family studies, collectively, the studies "created a powerful myth about the somatic nature of social problems," which solidified in an image of the "degenerate hillbilly family" beset by alcoholism, poverty, crime, and

prostitution, among other social stigma, as a result of its inferior heredity.⁶ I suggest that Wharton and Kelley's novels engage directly with this cultural mythology of the dysgenic family by constructing their own melancholy genealogies of rural life in the early decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, both Wharton and Kelley draw from their "literary fieldwork" in order to craft realist representations of impoverished rural communities. The novels both critique and reinforce the cultural and social discourses that surrounded the branding of certain individuals as dysgenic. Both novels also directly confront the problematic relationship between the birth control movement and eugenics. *Summer's* problematic ending suggests Wharton's work also reifies the pronatalist rhetoric surrounding the mobilization of the birth control movement in the service of containing "dysgenic" reproduction. In *Weeds*, Kelley centers the relationship between reproduction and degeneration around the disabling effects on women's bodies of physical labor and repeated childbirth. Kelley also employs a eugenic discourse of degeneration that dehumanizes the rural poor, as in "The Hill Folk" and *Summer*, to depict the debilitating effects on the body of poverty and labor. However, Kelley's depiction of the brutality of poverty, in particular on women and their bodies, actually intensifies the humanity of the tenant farmers.

Realism, Naturalism, and the Biopolitics of Representation

The Progressive Era authors, activists, doctors, and eugenicists I discuss in this chapter all participated in a culture of biofuturity in which the future of the nation was imagined in and through either the improvement or degeneration of individual bodies.

⁶ Ibid, p. 2.

This culture of biofuturity was particularly pronounced during this period in realist fiction and its subgenre of naturalism. Realist authors professed to employ a type of scientific method, a narrative objectivity through which to objectively present social relations. From this omniscient position, the realist author claimed to locate literature outside the social, outside ideology, and beyond the influence of systems of power, thus ostensibly transforming a genre of fiction into a record of social history. Yet realist authors do not simply serve as a panoptic force through which to produce the real. Rather, realist novels are a space of contestation where what constitutes the real is mediated and contested through the juxtaposition of alternative realities.⁷ As Amy Kaplan argues in *The Social Construction of American Realism*, “Realists do more than passively record the world outside; they actively create and criticize the meanings, representations, and ideologies of their own changing culture.”⁸ Kaplan focuses on realism’s representation of class difference as well as its relation to social change and the emergence of mass culture. She suggests that realist writers negotiate class conflict by constructing a common ground among classes, which ultimately both reinforces and undermines social hierarchies.

I attempt here to add to her formulating by suggesting that these novels negotiate class tensions in and through the body. It is generally realism’s “subgenre,” naturalism in which this literary scientific method is even more pronounced.⁹

⁷ Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988) p. 11.

⁸ Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism*, p. 7.

⁹ According to Georg Lukács, realism as a literary form can be defined as a dialectical movement of social forces between the apparent and the real, with realism serving as a means to understand these forces, while privileging the accuracy of representation or “seeing things as they really are.” Lukács rejects naturalism as a failed genre, however, arguing that “naturalistic theory and practice propounds a

Naturalism's emphasis on biological determinism has also meant that it is more often defined in relation to its representation of the body. For instance, Mark Seltzer argues that naturalism's preoccupation with the material—with the details of the physicality of bodies—is a response to the scientific drive toward the disciplining and standardization of the body.¹⁰ He suggests that the aesthetics of the naturalist novel is “an aesthetic of caricature, monstrosity, and deformity, an aesthetics of genesis as degeneration.”¹¹ Thus, rather than reproducing “the hegemonic vision of what the body should be,” which Lennard Davis suggests is the work the novel itself performs, the naturalist text often imagines the body the way it ostensibly should never be, and yet seems almost inescapably to become: as “monstrous,” as “degenerate,” as disabled.¹²

Realism, then, engages in a *biopolitics* of representation, in which authors, like their contemporary doctors, biologists, sociologists, and anthropologists, do not simply describe normal and deviant bodies but rather participate in their creation. That is, the norming of the body was an essential part of the realist project. The novels I examine in this chapter, Wharton's *Summer* and Kelley's *Weeds*, negotiate class tensions, specifically as produced and disseminated in eugenic projects such as the family studies, through a negotiation over what constitutes normal and deviant bodies. Both novels deconstruct the opposition between normal and deviant bodies. Wharton

mechanical, anti-dialectical unity between appearance and reality” by maintaining an antinomian or binary structure that disallows for an understanding of historical process, p. 76. Georg Lukács, *Writer and Critic* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1970).

¹⁰ Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

¹¹ Seltzer, p. 38.

¹² Lennard J. Davis, “Constructing Normalcy,” in *The Disability Studies Reader* (2nd ed.), ed. Lennard Davis (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 8.

by collapsing the distinctions between the Mountain family and the Royall family, and Kelley by exposing the processes through which normal becomes deviant, in fact normalizing the deviant body. Thus, rather than participating in a disembodied textuality, the both Wharton's and Kelley's novels engage in a "biopolitics" of representation in which what constitutes normative and deviant is reimagined.

The Hill Folk: The Making of Dvsgenic Americans

Eugenic family studies such as "The Hill Folk" (1912) presented a dystopic vision of the genetic progress of the American family.¹³ The family studies focused exclusively on the rural poor, in part, as Rafter argues, because of the lack of social institutions in rural areas to discipline and monitor the lives of the poor. Ironically, the pathologizing of rural poverty occurred at a moment when the urban middle class was experiencing a surge of nostalgia for agrarian life. This nostalgia might be understood in part as a reaction to the increasingly rigid organization of modern urban life, with rural life imagined as offering a degree of release from the rigid social and economic constraints of modernization.¹⁴ These studies are a firm rejection of this nostalgia. Rather, they suggest that impoverished rural families pose a threat to the national

¹³ "The Hill Folk" was originally published in as Memoir No. 1, Eugenics Record Office, Cold Spring Harbor, New York, August 1912. I am relying on the version reprinted by Rafter in White Trash.

¹⁴ Laura L. Lovett calls this phenomenon "nostalgic modernism," which she defines as a nostalgia for tradition that tended to be figured as an idealizing of motherhood, the home, and the family. According to Lovett, this nostalgia for tradition and anxiety about change was intrinsic to Progressive Era politics. Politics of the era were founded on uneasiness about the future as a result of a growing concern over the social and environmental consequences of modernization. This concern drove the movement for political and social change as a way to alter the direction of the progression of society, in a sense advocating moving forward toward an improved future by recapturing a lost past. Laura L. Lovett, *Conceiving the Future: Pronatalism, Reproduction, and the Family in the United States, 1890-1938* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

future because of their “degenerate” or “dysgenic” heredity, which manifested in the inability to reproduce the bourgeois social order. Dysgenic families were characterized by behaviors such as alcoholism, criminality, and sexual promiscuity, as well as by illnesses and physical “disabilities such as included, blindness, epilepsy, mental illness, and sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis. For women, “dysgenic” signified both uncontained sexuality that transgressed moral codes, such as working as prostitutes and/or giving birth to “illegitimate” children, and the more general inability to embody the standards of middle-class domesticity (in “The Hill Folk,” “untidy” homes is also provided as evidence of feeble-mindedness). For men, it meant economic impotence, or the inability to reproduce the bourgeois family by failing to “produce” within the new capitalist workplace. As such, these men were perceived as posing a threat to “healthy capitalism.” Thus, not only did these families live on the margins of the social system, often receiving financial “relief” from the state, they also existed outside the official economy. That is, dysgenic men and women often worked sporadically at seasonal labor and displayed indifference for material accumulation. They did they not earn money on a regular basis, and as Frank W. Blackmar states in “The Smoky Pilgrims,” they neglected to “spend it properly.”¹⁵ These families then also posed a challenge to the emerging ethos of consumer capitalism.¹⁶ Indeed, in the preface of “The Hill Folk,” Florence H. Danielson and Charles Davenport thank the financial assistance of Mr. John D. Rockefeller,

¹⁵ Rafter, *White Trash*, p. 65.

¹⁶ Perhaps the most astute articulation of the ideology of consumerism that emerged at the turn of the century is Thorstein Veblen’s *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), in which he critiques the increasing centrality to the U.S. economy of “conspicuous consumption,” or consumption for social status as opposed to necessity.

suggesting the study's overt entrenchment in capitalist ideology.

Authors of the family studies represented primarily three occupations: “eugenicists”—biologists and field researchers employed by Davenport at the ERO—social welfare workers, and sociologists.¹⁷ Davenport himself was a middle-class, U.S.-born zoologist who had taught at Harvard and the University of Chicago before he became the director of the Station for Experimental Evolution in Cold Springs Harbor, and eventually the director of the ERO. The ERO prepared 258 field workers, 219 of whom were women, at a summer training school from 1910 to 1924. Some of the researchers conducted field work in rural communities by administering surveys or holding fitter family contests at state fairs.¹⁸ Others took positions at state institutions such as hospitals and prisons. The women trained by Davenport at the ERO tended to be college-educated, reform-minded women; for instance, Danielson, researcher and co-author of “The Hill Folk,” had been trained by Davenport as a eugenic field worker and had a master's degree.¹⁹ Contemporary gender norms facilitated women's overrepresentation in the field, as their supposed greater capacity for intuition and observation was thought to be particularly well suited for eliciting personal information from study subjects. As the work of scholars such as Daylanne English suggests, these field workers' were trained to report on dysgenic behaviors, particularly dysgenic mothering practices.²⁰ They enforced a conservative domestic ideology that held poorer mothers to unrealistic standards of domesticity. Under the

¹⁷ Rafter, *White Trash*.

¹⁸ English, *Unnatural Selections*.

¹⁹ Little else is known about Danielson, other than that she married Joseph S. Davis in 1918 and moved to London. Rafter, *White Trash*.

²⁰ English, *Unnatural Selections*.

guise of promoting social welfare, these field workers actively sought out deviance from this domestic ideal with the end goal of eliminating it. However, unlike more progressive social reformers who sought to improve national health through education, the field workers and the eugenic family studies imagined the improvement of national bodies, and thus national health, by preventing the reproduction of “defectives” or “degenerates.”²¹

As Rafter argues in *White Trash*, the field workers and the authors of the studies employed an inconsistent, flawed methodology. For instance, the definition of “family” was inconsistent between studies, and the “data” were collected primarily from unreliable sources, specifically “personal visits, interviews with relatives, physicians, town officials, and reliable neighbors, and . . . court and town records.”²²

The researchers conduct a sort of genetic analysis of the deviant traits the researchers gather anecdotally, applying Mendelian theories of inheritance. The various family studies also share some common assumptions that inform the interpretation of the family data. First, if family members across more than one generation share a trait, the studies’ authors tend to assume the trait is inherited. Second, the authors tend to emphasize individual character flaws over environmental or social factors as cause for social problems. And third, the studies’ authors generally conflate heredity and social norms, assuming that if poor rural families do not subscribe to a bourgeois ethic it is

²¹ English suggests in *Unnatural Selections* that both the field workers and the “dysgenic” mothers who are the objects of their study “are functionally responsible, indeed necessary, for the production of the family studies. . . . The women of the Kallikak, Timber Rat, and other feeble-minded families produce dysgenic progeny; the field workers in turn replicate those offspring in the form of the study data. Thus dysgenic mothers and female eugenic field workers together are accountable for the production and for the narrative reproduction of a contaminated lineage,” p. 162.

²² This is the methodology described by Danielson and Davenport in their introduction to “The Hill Folk,” Rafter, p. 87.

because they are biologically incapable of doing so. As Danielson and Davenport's "The Hill Folk" exemplifies, much of the "scientific" data within these studies do not support the study's assumptions and must be creatively interpreted to support the authors' conclusions.²³

The first family study produced by the ERO was "The Hill Folk." The study began as an investigation of epileptic and "feebleminded" patients at the Monson, Massachusetts, state hospital. Danielson conducted the research at Monson, and under the direction of Davenport and Dr. Everett Flood, narrowed the scope of the study to one patient and his family connections. In the preface of the study, Danielson and Davenport, who co-authored the results, describe the value of this study as primarily sociological, asserting that the rural community they examine "can be found in nearly if not quite every county in the older states of the union, in which nearly all of the people belong to the vague class of the 'feebleminded'—the incapable."²⁴ The study examines a group of families who are connected by marriage and can be connected back to one of two men, Neil Rasp and Nuke (pseudonyms provided by the authors). Both men were immigrants; Rasp is French and Nuke is English. They both settled in the western hill region of a small New England town of about 2,000 people, a region Danielson and Davenport explain is derogatorily referred to as the "The Hill" by the townspeople. While the townspeople are described as "industrious" and "intelligent," the descendants of these two men are criminal, alcoholic, shiftless, and sexually "immoral." Danielson and Davenport report that most of the offspring of these men

²³ Rafter, *White Trash*.

²⁴ Rafter, *White Trash*, p. 85.

follow a similar pattern: early marriage, usually to an equally “defective” mate, followed by the birth of a large numbers of children who eventually either receive town relief, are imprisoned, or are placed in another state institution. They conclude by suggesting that “*rural* centers of ‘degeneration’” represent an exorbitant cost to the state that is better managed in urban areas, where dysgenic behaviors are “promptly recognized and cared for by segregating.” Alternatively, in rural areas, the authors suggest, the “feeble-minded” are “allowed to reproduce their traits unhindered and to create and send forth the broods of prostitutes, thieves, and drunkards that flock into our cities.”²⁵ Thus, the study does not suggest that “feeble-mindedness” is exclusive to rural areas; rather, it implies that, allowed to reproduce prolifically, the “degenerate” rural folk are seeping into urban areas where they contribute to crime and overtax welfare services.

The “Hill Folk,” like many of the eugenic family studies, defined physical disabilities such as blindness and epilepsy as a consequence not only of bad genes but also of immoral behavior. “Feeble-minded” was an expansive, inexact term that was used to describe people with physical and mental disabilities, as well as people who exhibited “deviant” social behaviors. Danielson and Davenport’s suggestion that “nearly all” rural people are feeble-minded reveals the way in which this category had expanded to include a plethora of social behaviors and physical traits that deviated from the norm.²⁶ Feeble-mindedness, which was also linked to criminality or

²⁵ Rafter, *White Trash*, p. 107.

²⁶ See Rafter, *White Trash*. She traces the changes in terminology for mental disability from “idiocy” and “imbecility” in the nineteenth century, to “feeble-mindedness” at the turn of the century, to “moron” beginning around 1910.

“defective delinquency,” was influenced by the work of criminologists such as Cesare Lombroso, in that eugenic field workers believed they could recognize mental “defects” with a simple glance, that mental disability registered visibly on the body. Yet, in the introduction to their study, Danielson and Davenport suggest the difficulty—if not impossibility—of distinguishing between what they call “low grade feeble-mindedness” and “an ignorant person who has normal mental ability.”²⁷ In fact, the authors use the term “normal” to describe people on the “borderline,” who although they do not display any evidence of a “striking censurable defect” are still considered suspect. Thus, Danielson and Davenport undermine their own findings by their inability to clearly define feeble-mindedness or even to distinguish it from “normal” traits. The study itself, then, calls into question its own ability to detect the presence of dysgenic traits. This suggests that what was considered so pernicious about feeble-mindedness is precisely its invisibility. That is, unlike people with physical disabilities, the “feeble-minded” were perceived as posing a greater threat to national health because they could “pass” for “normal.”²⁸

The data collected were often used to justify the sterilization or institutionalization of “dysgenic” men and women as a means of preventing them from reproducing. Indeed, at the outset of “The Hill Folk,” Danielson and Davenport assert that their intended results are the hastening of “the so much desired control by society of the grossly defective.”²⁹ These narratives of genetically “defective” families might be understood as providing a social scientific justification for eugenic legislation. In

²⁷ Rafter, *White Trash*, p. 87.

²⁸ See English, *Unnatural Selections*.

²⁹ Rafter, *White Trash*, p. 85.

his 1911 work *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics*, Davenport attempt to define the “dysgenic” in relation to the larger social body, as follows: “They [laws] tacitly assume that all people are alike; while admitting that there are some who are different and who constitute special classes that must be specially provided for. These special classes are of eugenic interest....The individuals composing these special classes are not in all respects distinct, but rather they are more or less peculiar in one or more respects.”³⁰ Davenport advocates that the law should treat people with “peculiar” traits differently, by segregating and sterilizing them in order to prevent their disturbance of the social order and their “hindrance to our social progress.”³¹ Indeed, as Susan Schweik thoroughly demonstrates in *The Ugly Laws*, the segregation of people with disabilities has a long history, implemented with the poor-farm, the almshouse, and finally clinical medical insitutions.³² from 1907 to 1930, 24 states passed negative eugenic legislation that permitted the sterilization of people perceived as feeble-minded or in other ways exhibiting undesirable “racial” traits.³³ Of course, the procedures of sterilization employed were direct result of advances made in reproductive science by practitioners. Compulsory sterilization for eugenic purposes was primarily enacted on the bodies of the incarcerated and the poor and working

³⁰ Charles B. Davenport, *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics* (New York, Henry Holt, 1911).

³¹ Davenport in *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics* advocates institutionalizing dysgenic men and women in order to prevent reproduction. If the “retarded development” of the men and women improves “under the good environment of institutional life,” Davenport allows they should be permitted to marry and reproduce.

³² Susan M. Schweik, *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

³³ Nazi Germany actually modeled its sterilization program on the practices implemented in the U.S. during this time.

classes. Interestingly, just as many men as women were sterilized during this period.³⁴

By attempting to reinscribe a moral order on the body, “The Hill Folk,” together with the other eugenic family studies, produced a cultural mythology of the norm in opposition to “degenerate” behaviors and bodies at a moment when U.S. culture was perceived as divided and disunited. First, the studies all examine impoverished rural communities and take for granted that country life inherently leads to physical and social degeneracy, suggesting urban life is both normal and natural. Second, the studies often racialize their subjects, linking their degeneracy to familial relations with people of color and immigrants. Study participants, for instance, are often represented in racialized terms, such as “swarthy,” “yellow,” “dusky,” and so forth. Third, the studies emphasize the centrality of women’s bodies to both the perpetuation of dysgenic traits and the enactment of eugenic programs. Many of the studies tended to trace family lineage through women, they emphasized the “promiscuous” reproductive practices of dygenic women, and they cited poor domestic skills as a primary factor in the perpetuation of dysgenic behaviors by children. Finally, the studies biologized social problems, blurring the boundaries between heredity and environment. Indeed, in “The Hill Folk,” Danielson and Davenport’s data do not jive with their “Mendelian expectation,” that is, two “feble-minded” parents did not always produce a “feble-minded” child.³⁵ In response, the authors reformulate the term “feble-minded” as a “legal or sociological,

³⁴ English, *Unnatural Selections*. In fact, in Davenport’s *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics*, he advocates vasectomy as the safest means of sterilization.

³⁵ This did not occur in about 20% of the subjects. Gregor Mendel performed experiments on pea plants in the 1850s-1860s, through which he developed a set of laws for the genetic inheritance of certain traits. His work was rediscovered in the early twentieth century and adopted by eugenicists such as Davenport.

rather than a biological term.”³⁶ However, they continue to explain it in biological terms, as an inherited trait. The authors cannot seem to reconcile their ideological expectations with the scientific evidence. Ultimately, they assert that the “capacity of these people for good and evil is born with them and bred in the bone and environment acts as a more or less effective screen or lure.”³⁷ This semantic confusion over what is biology and what is social, and even over what is normal and what is feeble-minded, suggests a nervousness about the loss over control the social body, over what constitutes normal and acceptable behavior and bodies in the face of a rapidly changing social world. If, as Ato Quayson suggests, the social world is structured with normativity in mind, these texts exhibit anxiety over the destabilization of that norm as a result of urbanization, immigration, and the expansion of political and social rights for women and African Americans.³⁸ These studies participate in the culture of biofuturity by imagining the elimination of dysgenic bodies and behaviors and, as a result, the improvement of the individual and thus the national body.

Wharton and Eugenics

Recent scholarship on Wharton’s politics have positioned her work’s political engagement on both sides of the spectrum. For instance in *Edith Wharton and the Politics of Race*, Jennie A. Kassanoff argues that scholarship on Wharton has been reluctant to address her conservative politics, citing the editors of Wharton’s letters,

³⁶ Rafter, *White Trash*, p. 98.

³⁷ Rafter, *White Trash*, p. 126.

³⁸ Ato Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

R.W.B. and Nancy Lewis, who concede that they excluded what they deem “atypical” racially pejorative letters in order to protect Wharton from the ill effects of their inclusion.³⁹ Dale M. Bauer, however, suggests that Wharton’s work had a more progressive political as not only a vehicle for her critique of the New York elite but also of the reactionary moral strictures in the United States that increasingly regulated and managed the body, such as the Comstock laws.⁴⁰ Where these scholars converge, however, is in their reading of Wharton’s *Summer* in the context of eugenic discourse in the early decades of the twentieth century. Wharton’s fiction is invested in and contributes to the racial and class politics of the era. Through the novel, Wharton participates in the culture of biofuturity by imagining the degeneracy of the national body through the dysgenic reproduction of the rural poor.

Wharton’s interest and knowledge of contemporary eugenic and nativist discourse is related in part to her relationship with Morton Fullerton. Fullerton authored a number of works that critiqued nationalism, particularly in relation to U.S. imperialism.⁴¹ In her correspondence with Fullerton, the two discuss popular eugenic theories, including Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau’s promotion of a “racial aristocracy”

³⁹ Kassinoff argues that the reluctance of scholars to engage with Wharton’s conservative politics, in the way recent scholarship has addressed the conservatism of Ezra Pound, for instance, is a symptom of unexamined assumptions about gender and class. She claims that framing conservatism as Wharton’s “birthright” due to her “elite inheritance” of old New York pedigree reifies the relationship between conservative politics and elite class positions, and eliminates the possibility that upper-class women would strategically deploy their ideological views within their work as would their male peers. See Jennie A. Kassinoff, *Edith Wharton and the Politics of Race* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁴⁰ Trying to position writers of this period as conservative or progressive based on their racial politics is very difficult, as many well-known figures in the progressive movement expressed racist and nativist views.

⁴¹ Fullerton’s works include *Patriotism and Science: Some Studies in Historical Psychology* (1893) and *Problems of Power* (1913).

and Vernon Kellogg's *Darwinism Today*.⁴² Wharton also claimed French historian Hippolyte Taine as a formative influence on her understandings of race theory.⁴³ However, her own experience with illness might have more profoundly influenced her critique of eugenic rhetoric that pitted representations of the ailing, "overcivilized" middle and upper classes against poor, "feebleminded" whites as the origin of national degeneration. Both she and her husband, Teddy, sought the treatment of the infamous neurologist S. Weir Mitchell after being diagnosed with neurasthenia. Wharton was ill from 1891 until about 1895 and experienced a "breakdown" in 1898, after which she underwent the rest cure.⁴⁴ Dale Bauer suggests that "knowing too well from experience that high as well as low society had its share of insanity, incest, and moral bankruptcy, Wharton had to reconsider and ultimately reject eugenic assurances about the upper classes and good breeding."⁴⁵ However, Wharton remains a detached observer of the eugenic drama of the impoverished rural countryside. While she does apply a critical lens to the eugenic discourse of national degeneracy, her novel ultimately posits a biological dimension to class status that cannot be transcended.

"They Ain't Half Human up There": *Summer* and the Mountain Folk

Wharton's novel *Summer* is the story of anxiety over racial decline in a small New England town. In the opening pages of the novel, Wharton describes the

⁴² Dale M. Bauer, *Edith Wharton's Brave New Politics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994). Also see R.W.B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis, eds., *The Letters of Edith Wharton* (New York: Scribners, 1988).

⁴³ Taine's articulated a scientific theory of literature that was defined by race, milieu, and moment. His ideas of race incorporated Lamarckian theories of evolution.

⁴⁴ Tom Lutz, *American Nervousness: 1903, an Anecdotal History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

⁴⁵ Bauer, p. 32.

fictional town of North Dormer as a “weather-beaten, sunburnt village of the hills, abandoned of men, left apart by railway, trolley, telegraph, and all the forces that link life to life in modern community. It had no shops, no theaters, no lectures, no ‘business block’; only a church that was opened every other Sunday if the state of the roads permitted, and a library for which no new books had been bought for twenty years.”⁴⁶ North Dormer is all but excluded from the national community, as a result of its having been bypassed by the forces of modernization and by the absence of men (who presumably have left to seek employment). Indeed, Wharton’s description of the villagers that inspired *Summer* in New England is fraught with references to their physical and moral decay. She characterizes them as insane, incestuous, mentally slow, and morally starved, hardly a sympathetic portrait.⁴⁷ The decline of the rural towns was in large part the result of mass emigration at the turn of the century from rural to urban areas, and in part from the lack of “new blood” in the towns to “revitalize” the inhabitants. At the same time that New England towns were being studied for their social and biological “degeneracy,” they were also embarking on campaigns to attract both medical and erotic tourism to the region, as exemplified in the Old Home Week celebration in North Dormer.⁴⁸

Although written while Wharton was abroad in France during World War I 1917, the novel is deeply rooted in Wharton’s own experiences living in rural New

⁴⁶ Edith Wharton, *Summer* (Stilwell, KS: Digireads, 2005), p. 4.

⁴⁷ Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1934).

⁴⁸ For instance, in 1897, Frank West Rollins, governor of New Hampshire, initiated “Old Home Week” to lure former New Englanders back for a visit, which would also provide a boost to the local economy. The campaign was billed as “a revitalized version of the mythic colonial village, a place where upright Protestants lived in rural simplicity, unmolested by the complicating demands of ethnic and racial pluralism.” Kassinoff, p. 125.

England. Wharton herself spent many summers in the Berkshires, at her estate in Lenox, Massachusetts, “The Mount,” which she designed and built in 1902.⁴⁹ The Mount served as an escape for Wharton from both her family’s elite New York social connections and the tumultuous political and social climate of the U.S. at the turn of the century.⁵⁰ From her home, Wharton engaged in a sort of literary tourism, exploring the “backwoods” of Massachusetts and New Hampshire and what she described as their “decaying” and “derelict” villages with “sad slow-speaking people.”⁵¹ In fact, Wharton’s forays into the Berkshires can be read as “field studies” akin to those conducted by Davenport’s eugenic researchers. She too relies on second-hand knowledge in her representation of the lives of the Berkshire “townies,” drawing on conversations with the Lenox rector and other high-status locals.⁵²

While *Summer* is influenced by Wharton’s own observations of these small villages, it also seems to directly allude to “The Hill Folk.” Like the community studied by Danielson and Davenport in the “The Hill Folk,” North Dormer has a dygenic doppelganger on “the Mountain,” which “seemed to cast its shadow on North Dormer.”⁵³ The Mountain folk both cast a pall on North Dormer and are literally a shadow community. The mountain community is repeatedly described as a colony, a “queer colony” of “out-laws,” as in the description that follows.

⁴⁹ The Mount was her primary residence until about 1911, when she moved permanently to Europe after Teddy’s illness worsened and their marriage deteriorated.

⁵⁰ See Kassanoff.

⁵¹ Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance*.

⁵² See Veronica Makowsky and Lyn Z. Bloom, “Edith Wharton’s tentative Embrace of Charity: Class and Character in *Summer*,” 32, No. 3 (2000). They argue that, in fact, Wharton employs a type of “literary imperialism,” in which she mines the “natives” as material for the entertainment of the urban elite.

⁵³ Wharton, *Summer*, p. 4.

Down at Creston they told me that the first colonists are supposed to have been men who worked on the railway that was built forty or fifty years ago between Springfield and Nettleton. Some of them took to drink or got in trouble with the police, and went off—disappeared into the woods. A year or two later there was a report that they were living up on the mountain. Then I suppose others joined them—and children were born. Now they say there are over a hundred people up there. They seem to be quite outside the jurisdiction of the valleys. No school, no church—and no sheriff ever goes up to see what they're about.⁵⁴

The use of the word “colonists” marks the mountain community as non-native, as foreign, as other—that is, as irretrievably outside the nation. This is reinforced by their description as living outside the jurisdiction of the law, beyond the reach of the state. Their lack of the basic markers of legitimate community, church and state, as well as legitimating institutions such as marriage, suggest their illegitimacy both as a community and as citizens. Furthermore, their labor on the railroad suggests that they, like the progenitors of the Hill Folks of Neil Rasp and Nuke, are recent immigrants.⁵⁵ In fact, Wharton racializes of the mountain folk as “gypsy-looking,” conflating poverty, race, and ethnicity. The “shadow” that the Mountain community casts on North Dormer, than, might be read as the threat of racial degeneration posed by the amalgamated immigrant community.

Summer, then, must be contextualized within the eugenic discourse of the Progressive Era that relied on race as a signifier of genetic fitness. This discourse privileged native-born white Americans over the new immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. As David Roediger argues in *Working Toward Whiteness*,

⁵⁴ Wharton, *Summer*, p. 24.

⁵⁵ Albert Jenks, wrote in *Scientific Monthly* in 1921 that “ethnic groups differ from each other [because of] heredity resident in the reproductive germ cells....Any ‘boss of a gang of mixed foreigners on any American railway job’ allegedly knew of these differences, which began ‘inside the seeds of the breeds,’” as cited in David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), p. 23.

scholarship on whiteness has tended to apply the term “ethnicity” to racialized distinctions among people we would now classify as belonging to different ethnic groups. He cautions against this substitution, as the use of “race” to distinguish among ethnic whites does not directly correspond to “ethnicity” as it is now understood, citing the fact that within the more than a million pages that make up the Cornell University Library Making of Americans database, neither “ethnicity” nor “ethnic group” are used.⁵⁶ As Roediger suggests, then, the term “new immigrant” itself signaled a racial difference that was a composite of biology and culture.

In this paradigm of whiteness, Southern and Eastern Europeans, on one end, and Northern, or Anglo-Teutonic, Europeans, on the other, were dichotomized such that the former—the new immigrants—became the semiotic Other of the native-born white American. Eugenic and nativist discourse tended to emphasize immigrants’ lack of education, “self-reliance,” and an understanding of American social and legal institutions. In this way, the racialized new immigrant was entangled with eugenic discourses of feeble-mindedness that naturalized class distinctions and reinforced the political rhetoric of liberal individualism that undergirded much eugenic writing. For instance, Davenport asserts that “the population of the United States, will, on account of the great influx of blood from South-eastern Europe, rapidly become “darker in pigmentation, smaller in stature...more given to crimes of larceny, assault, murder, rape, and sex-immorality. Since of the insane in hospitals there are relatively more foreign-born than native, it seems probable that, under present conditions, the ratio of

⁵⁶ The Making of Americans database contains a large collection of journal and magazines circulated in the U.S. from 1815 to 1926.

insanity in the population will rapidly increase.”⁵⁷ By insisting that characteristics of “self-reliance” and “initiative” as well as criminal behaviors were biologically determined eugenicists such as Davenport invalidated social reform efforts (“charity”) as producing a Spencerian “unnatural selection” that had enabled the least fit to become the most reproductively successful, and limited the defining qualities of “American exceptionalism” to native-born whites.

Indeed, the central character of *Summer* is Charity Royall, who had been brought down from the Mountain” by “the biggest man in North Dormer,” Lawyer Royall.⁵⁸ “She had been christened Charity...to commemorate Mr. Royall’s disinterestedness in ‘bringing her down,’ and to keep alive in her a becoming sense of her dependence.”⁵⁹ Mr. and Mrs. Royall raise Charity at the request of Charity’s father, a man Lawyer Royall had himself convicted of manslaughter, who asks Royall to rear his daughter like a Christian.” Mrs. Royall dies seven years later, and Charity is left alone with Royall, who in his “loneliness” begins to desire Charity. Indeed, he in essence asks her to return his charity by becoming his wife. Charity, however, falls in love with a young architect commissioned to study eighteenth century houses in the region, Lucius Harney, who visits North Dormer to sketch local houses. The two engage in a passionate affair, which ends with pregnancy for Charity and marriage to a young woman with more socially advantage family connections for Harney. Harney might be read as an agent of preservation and revitalization, as his affair with Charity

⁵⁷ Davenport, *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics*, p. 219.

⁵⁸ Wharton’s friend, Elisina Tyler, claims Wharton’s inspiration for her heroine’s name came from “a newspaper account of a crime committed by ‘Charity Royall,’ a black girl descended from a slave.” Shari Benstock, *No Gifts From Chance: A Biography of Edith Wharton* (New York: Scribner’s, 1994), p. 327.

⁵⁹ Wharton, *Summer*, p. 9.

ultimately “reinjects” the area with “patrician” blood, providing a sort of racial stimulus in tandem with the economic boost promised by Old Home Week.

Charity’s “Mountain folk” roots mark her as alien, foreign, and different. Wharton employs racialized signifiers to represent Charity, describing her as “swarthy,” which alludes to both her biological and social difference from the townspeople of North Dormer as a result of her questionable heredity. In the opening pages of the novel, Charity, looking in the mirror at her “small, swarthy face,” wished for the thousandth time that she had blue eyes like Annabel Balch.”⁶⁰ Charity herself seems to locate her “difference” in class status in her physical appearance, as Annabel not only is “whiter” than Charity but richer as well. When Charity confesses to Harney that she came from the Mountain, he exclaims, “How curious! I suppose that’s why you’re so different.”⁶¹ He accompanies his exclamation with a kiss on her “sunburnt knuckles,” erotically locating Charity’s “difference” in her color and her Mountain blood.

Wharton also represents Charity’s difference in traits associated with “degenerate” biology, for instance, her disinterest in education, her poor work ethic, and the “squandering” of her savings. Wharton ironically positions her as the part-time town librarian, although Charity hates to be “bothered about books.” Indeed Charity feels dead at the library, which she considers her “prison-house.” She is constantly escaping her duties there to lie in the grass: “But to all that was light and air, perfume and color, every drop of blood in her responded. She loved the roughness

⁶⁰ Wharton, *Summer*, p. 3.

⁶¹ Wharton, *Summer*, p. 24.

of the dry mountain grass under her palms, the smell of the thyme into which she crushed her face, the fingering of the wind into her hair and through her cotton blouse.”⁶² Her blood, her genes, her biology, Wharton suggests, place her closer to “nature,” and she understands the natural world not rationally through observation, but instinctively through the senses of touch and smell. Wharton describes Charity as possessing an “animal secretiveness” and as repeatedly mystified by the “unknown forces” that intervene in her life from beyond North Dormer. She cannot imagine the totality of the social, and is reduced to a “childish savagery.” Through her descriptions of Charity as primitive and child-like and as unable to be stimulated by the cultural and intellectual possibilities of the library, Wharton suggests that rural degeneracy cannot be contained by the sort of “civilizing mission” the Royalls undertook with Charity.

And yet in Wharton’s case study of small town life, a thin veneer separates the Mountain folk from the townspeople. Unlike the “industrious” and “intelligent” townspeople of Danielson and Davenport’s “The Hill Folk,” Wharton reveals a persistent instability in the distinction between the Mountain folk and townspeople of North Dormer, as embodied in Lawyer Royall, “the biggest man in North Dormer.” Royall, who vociferously denounces the lawlessness of the “outlaws” who live on the mountain, calls into question the supposed distinction between the two communities. He too, like the “queer colonists,” is morally suspect. He is an alcoholic on the verge of poverty, whose sexual transgressions lead him to associate with “disreputable girls” and ultimately to confuse familial relations by first desiring and then marrying the girl

⁶² Wharton, *Summer*, p. 8.

he raised as a daughter. Charity's difference and danger lay in her embodiment of the conflation of mountain and town, and its implications for her status as legal and illegitimate, daughter and wife. Although the people of North Dormer insist that the town embodies "the most refined civilization" in relation to the dysgenic families who live in the mountain community above, Wharton slowly erodes this distinction throughout the novel, paralleling the social lawlessness of the Mountain community with the moral decay of North Dormer.

When Charity discovers she is pregnant and Harney is engaged to Annabel Balch, she visits a "female physician," Dr. Merkle, in Nettleton, a larger neighboring town. In the common parlance at the turn of the century, "female physician" often implied abortionist. Indeed, Dr. Merkle's physical description is remarkably similar to that of Madame Restell, an infamous nineteenth-century abortionist who operated in New York City with tacit consent until the 1870s, when she was put on trial.⁶³ Merkle herself is problematically marked as foreign, in her pronunciation of "noospaper," for example, suggestion that ideas of reproductive control are not "native" to American ideology. Much like the house where Charity eventually finds her dead mother, Wharton represents Dr. Merkle's office as a den of sexual transgression, in which abortion, midwifery, and prostitution are confused and linked to racial indeterminacy in the figure of the "mulatto girl with a bushy head" who leads Charity into the clinic. Dr. Merkle, and the abortionist in general, Wharton suggests, is a false friend to women: "This woman with the false hair, the false teeth, the false murderous smile—

⁶³ According to Bauer, Restell was described as an "ample figure" with a "dark complexion," "luxuriant dark brown hair," and "piercing eyes" p. 41. Wharton describes Merkle as "a plump woman with small bright eyes, [and] an immense mass of black hair," *Summer*, p. 75.

what was she offering her but immunity from some unthinkable crime?”⁶⁴ Dr. Merkle demands five dollars for the visit, and when Charity cannot pay it, she extorts from her the brooch Harney had given her. Later, when she returns to the clinic to pay her debt and retrieve her brooch, Dr. Merkle insists on being paid the two twenty dollar bills given to Charity by Lawyer Royall. The doctor’s exploitation of Charity suggests a skepticism of the birth control movement, as a potential tool for eugenic manipulation of women’s reproduction.

As Charity’s melancholy genealogy unfolds, Wharton interweaves images of animals to describe the “lower” human reproduction of Charity’s dysgenic mountain mother. Wharton draws on contemporary “scientific studies” of “dysgenic mothers,” such as “The Hill Folk,” in representing Charity’s mother, who fails to exhibit appropriate maternal instinct by, first, becoming pregnant out of wedlock and, second, conceding to give up her daughter. These representation of dysgenic mothers engage with cultural anxiety over what Teddy Roosevelt calls the “willful sterility” of the “new women,” and thus also with the discourse of race suicide. Anxieties over the declining white, native-born, middle-class birth rate and the in birth rates of immigrants and the poor and working classes were mobilized to justify the increased surveillance of women’s bodies and reproductive practices.

Charity learns about her own “dygenic” parentage when she overhears Lawyer Royall talking to Harney: “There was a mother. But she was glad enough to have her go. She’d have given her to anybody.”⁶⁵ Charity then “was the child of a drunken

⁶⁴ Wharton, *Summer*, p. 75.

⁶⁵ Wharton, *Summer*, p. 26.

convict and a mother who wasn't 'half human.'"⁶⁶ At the end of the novel, after Charity is abandoned by Harney and has decided not to abort the pregnancy, she flees to the Mountain in search of her mother. However, she reaches her mother just after she has died. "A woman lay on [the mattress], but she did not look like a dead woman; she seemed to have fallen across her bed in a drunken sleep....There was no sign of anything human; she lay there like a dead dog in a ditch."⁶⁷ Charity composes her mother's body, pulling up her stockings and pulling down her skirt. As there is no coffin, the church rector covers the body with a coat and says last rites, while Charity's motley crew of half brothers and sisters bicker over who has rights to the stove. When the rector is done speaking, two men lift the mattress up and carry the body outside, lowering the mattress into the grave. This scene is perhaps the most overt fashioning by Wharton of a eugenic family study through her description of Charity's family as animalistic and degenerate. In her description of this scene, Wharton also relied on her own "eugenic field work." In a letter from Wharton's secretary to the Reverend Ludlow of Norfolk, Connecticut, Wharton expresses appreciation for Ludlow's recognition of the "reality of what she describes" in *Summer*. Specifically, she recounts that "the scene of the funeral in 'Summer' was described to her by the Rector of a Church in a small New England town near which she lived for many years, the rector having been sent for by the Mountain people exactly as she relates the incident in her book."⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Wharton, *Summer*, p. 26.

⁶⁷ Wharton, *Summer*, p. 82-83.

⁶⁸ Letter dated September 12, 1917, to The Reverend Dr. Ludlow. Edith Wharton Collection. Yale Collection of American Literature. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Much like Davenport's study of "the Hill folk," Wharton thus pathologizes and attributes to genetic degeneracy the experience of poverty in this mountain community. Wharton's description of the Mountain folk as animals reinforces both the alien and foreign aspect of the "outlaw colonists," while also eliminating any possibility for affinity between Charity and her kin: "But it was impossible to imagine any link between them...Anything, anything was better than to add another life to the nest of misery on the Mountain."⁶⁹ Ultimately Charity rejects both the "the savage misery of the poor Mountain farmers" and the fate of "miserable creatures" like Julia, a former client of Dr. Merkle who is now a prostitute. Rather, Charity's marriage to Royall seems to be Wharton's own brand of eugenic solution for the fate of a hybrid such as Charity: "In the established order of things, she saw that there was no place for her individual adventure."⁷⁰ Wharton then poses a complicated vision of the relationship between biology class, and character. Although the line between "civilization" and "lawlessness" is a slippery one, she seems to suggest that ultimately the social discipline of middle-class morality is necessary to retain our humanity. Although she does not offer the same grim solution as Davenport, who advocates mandatory sterilization of dysgenic populations, Wharton does not imagine a charitable future for her heroine. Rather Charity's marriage to Royall must be accomplished in order to balance her "dysgenic" inheritance, that is, her own "promiscuity" and subsequent "illegitimate" pregnancy. While the marriage ultimately allows some allusion of social decorum to be retained, it is a complicated

⁶⁹ Wharton, *Summer*, p. 86-87.

⁷⁰ Wharton, *Summer*, p. 75.

and contradictory resolution in which incest is preferred over illegitimacy.

Daughters of Toil

Like Wharton's *Summer*, Edith Summers Kelley's novel *Weeds* is a literary case study of rural poverty. *Weeds* is the story of a woman coming of age in a tenant farming community in Kentucky. Published in 1923 by Harcourt, Brace, the novel received critical praise; however, it was not a commercial success. *Weeds* was not reprinted until it was "rediscovered" by Michael J. Bruccoli in 1972.⁷¹ Kelley composed the novel after her and her husband's unsuccessful attempt at tobacco farming in rural Kentucky.⁷² Kelley was a college-educated writer from Toronto who worked as a secretary for Upton Sinclair from 1905 to 1906 at his farm in Princeton and at Helicon Hall.⁷³ Through Sinclair, Kelley was introduced to a number of literary figures, including Sinclair Lewis and her first husband, with whom she had two children. Their marriage lasted only three years. She and her second husband, C. Fred Kelley, attempted farming in Kentucky, New Jersey, and the Imperial Valley of California, and raised chickens in San Diego.⁷⁴

In *Weeds*, Kelley depicts the debilitating labor of farming tobacco and the precarious living to be had from its sale, which is subject to shifting market prices, the seemingly inevitable extremes of rain and draught, illness, and other forces that are beyond the farmers' control. The tension between the outer (environmental) and inner

⁷¹ Charlotte Margolis Goodman, "Afterword." *Weeds* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1982).

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Helicon hall was an experimental cooperative living community that included communal kitchens and central nurseries.

⁷⁴ See Goodman; Lisa Orr, *Transforming American Realism: Working-Class Women Writers of the Twentieth Century* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007).

(biology) conditions that determine the fate of the characters places the novel in the tradition of American literary naturalism. In fact, it is the relationship between environment, gender, and biology that is at the core of the work's signifying economy. The novel's depiction of the debilitating and disabling effects on the body of poverty and labor employs the discourse of degeneration that dehumanizes the rural poor, as in "The Hill Folk" and *Summer*. However, Kelley's depiction of the brutality of poverty both intensifies the humanity of the tenant farmers while also exposing the deeply exploitative and unjust economic structure that ensnares them in poverty. Like Wharton, she relies on her own "field research," experience managing a rural Kentucky farm, to compose her case study rural farm families. Kelley describes the "dysgenic" population of farmers as follows:

In the backwoods corners of America, where people have been poorly benighted for several generations and where for as many generations, no new blood has entered, where everybody is cousin, first, second, or third, to everyone else for miles around, the children are mostly dull of mind and scrawny of body. Not infrequently, however, there will be born a child of clear features and strong, straight body, as a reminder of Pioneer days when clear features and strong, straight bodies were the rule rather than the exception.⁷⁵

In this passage we hear echoes of the rhetoric of degeneracy employed by Danielson and Davenort in their study of "The Hill Folk." Specifically, Kelley's description suggests the invigorated, adventurous race of homesteaders has yielded to a debased, inbred clan, as a result of poor reproductive choices and poverty.

Kelley's novel tells the story of the Pippinger family. From the beginning of the novel, Kelley makes clear the connection between the tenant farmers and the

⁷⁵ Edith Summers Kelley, *Weeds* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1982), p. 13.

central trope of “weeds” that structures the text. She describes the weeds that invade the Pippinger farm as the manifestation of the farmer’s seemingly inevitable destiny. An “unfit” farmer, “it was none of his doing if the weeds grew so fast that they soon overtopped the corn. Bill was not the inventor of weeds nor of their nefarious habits of growing faster than corn.” As in the descriptions of the “Hill Folk,” Bill Pippinger’s failure as a farmer who is unable to sustain a productive existence is equated with his biology. Although he had mastered the blacksmith trade, he is the son of a farmer and married a woman with a farm. “Chance...that wayward arbiter of the fates of us all... had spoiled a good blacksmith to make a poor farmer.”⁷⁶ However, Kelley suggests that it is not that Bill’s ineptness as a farmer is not the result of bad genes but of the social circumstances of his life.

The trope of weeds, then, mediates the environment-heredity binary by rendering the labor of the farmer ineffective against the encroachment of the wild, and by positing the farmers and their families themselves as uncultivated, bare life. Indeed, in *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Zygmunt Bauman suggests that the metaphor of the garden operates to distinguish between productive and wasteful bodies.

The modern state was a gardening state. Its stance was a gardening stance. It delegitimized the present (wild, uncultivated) condition of the population and dismantled the extant mechanisms of reproduction and self-balancing. It put in their place purposely built mechanisms meant to point the change in the direction of the rational design. The design, presumed to be dictated by the supreme and unquestionable authority of Reason, supplied the criteria to evaluate present-day reality. These criteria split the population into useful plants to be encouraged and tenderly propagated, and weeds—to be removed or rooted out. They put a premium on the needs of the useful plants...and disendowed the needs of those declared to be weeds. They cast both categories as

⁷⁶ Kelley, *Weeds*, p. 4-5.

objects of action and denied to both the rights of self-determining agents.⁷⁷

The splitting of the population into useful, productive bodies and bodies that don't matter, then, is a means to order social relations according to a “universal design” that privileges the norm. Applying this metaphor to the U.S. in the early years of the twentieth century, and thus reading the national body as a garden, reveals that the privileging “useful” plants enabled eugenic practices such as coerced sterilization, which was implemented to “weed out” so-called degenerates in order to fashion a better breed of citizens.

Bill's daughter, Judith Pippinger, is the central protagonist of Kelley's novel. Like Charity Royall, she is marked as unusual in the rural farming community, although not because of her ambiguous social status but by her healthy, attractive body and her inversion of normative gender constructs. As a child, Judith stands out from the “mostly inbred and undernourished children” of the neighboring farms who “were pallid, long-faced, adenoidal little creatures.”⁷⁸ Judith, by contrast, is described as different in both her physical composition and her vivacity: “There was something different in the girl's own inherited nature that made her different from her brothers and sisters and from the docile, mouse-like little girls and boys who sat beside her on the school benches.”⁷⁹ Kelley's emphasis on Judith's distinction as manifesting from her “inherited nature” recalls the eugenic discourse of the family studies. She is the Mendelian outlier, the genetic drift that she has somehow managed to elude heredity.

⁷⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge, UK: Polity), 1991, p. 20.

⁷⁸ Kelley, *Weeds*, p. 12.

⁷⁹ Kelley, *Weeds*, p. 13.

Judith, then, is

a poppy among the weeds. Something more than her beauty set her apart from the others; an ease and naturalness of movement, a freedom from constraint, a completeness to the abandon of fun and merrymaking, to which these daughters of toil in their most hectic moments could never attain. Somehow, in spite of her ancestry, she had escaped the curse of the soil.⁸⁰

Judith then is depicted as a genetic gem that emerges from the degraded gene pool of the Kentucky farm town.

Her genetic exceptionalism, however, is gendered. It is predicated on both her rejection of traditional femininity, and on her attractive, feminine, sexualized body. Judith is described as “more a boy'n a gal”; she rejects traditional domestic labor and prefers to work outside, planting and tending the garden and caring for livestock. Her husband Jerry describes her as different from other women: “you’re the on’y woman I know that’s got a man’s ways, Judy.”⁸¹ Kelley’s gendering of Judith’s “difference” seems to suggest that “woman” itself is a debased, degenerate state, that Judith has somehow surmounted the obstacles of not only her genetic inheritance but also those of her sex. Yet Judith is described as more like a man only by male characters, suggesting that gender ideologies become embodied through discursive habits. That Judith exhibits qualities perceived as “superior” to both the men and women in the community can only be comprehensible to the men if she is imagined as more like them.

Kelley focuses in particular on the labor of the women in the community, who work in the home and in the fields and whose bodies become increasingly exhausted

⁸⁰ Kelley, *Weeds*, p. 88.

⁸¹ Kelley, *Weeds*, p. 103

by both physical labor and repeated childbirth. In *Weeds*, Kelley centers the relationship between reproduction and degeneration around the disabling effects of physical labor and repeated childbirth on women's bodies. Like Wharton's *Summer*, Kelley's novel negotiates both eugenic discourses that emphasized improving white racial stock by controlling who reproduces, and activism by early feminists such as Margaret Sanger who advocated for the availability of birth control as a means to ensure the health of women as well as of the nation by preventing the reproduction of "dysgenic" populations.

In fact, the novel contains some of the most graphic depictions of both childbirth and of a woman's attempt to induce a miscarriage. Interestingly, the childbirth scene was cut from the original edition by Harcourt, Brace, while the detailed description of the Judith's attempts to abort her pregnancy was allowed to stand. In the excised chapter titled "Billy's Birth," Kelley describes the experience of birth in excruciating detail. While Judith experiences agonizing pain, both her Aunt Mary and the itinerant physician display little empathy. Only her husband is as terrified as she is. During the course of the long labor, Judith slowly transforms; she begins to emit a "deep-toned, guttural, sound that had ended in a snarl. It was not like that of an ordinary dog; but more like Jerry imagined some wild, doglike creature, inhabitant of lonely waste country, might growl and snarl over its prey."⁸² Kelley's description of Judith as "wolflike" suggests, then, that childbirth has the potential to degenerate women. In the later scene, when Judith has become pregnant for the fourth time after a short affair with an evangelist, she desperately tries to abort the baby using

⁸² Kelley, *Weeds*, p. 343.

a number of popular folk methods. She finally succeeds in triggering a miscarriage by nearly drowning herself in the horse pond. Both the representation of Judith a reduced to an animal-like state as a result of childbirth and her desperation over her inability to control her fertility seem to be an almost direct allusion to Margaret Sanger's arguments for the legalization of birth control.

Indeed, Kelley suggests, Judith cannot escape the biological destiny of her sex. As a result of multiple pregnancies and hard farm labor, Judith begins to resemble the other "daughters of toil." Her body begins to take on the appearance of the "degenerate" bodies of the "old folks" in her farming community who are disabled by physical labor:

under fifty and most of them in the thirties and forties, it was a scarecrow array of bent limbs, bowed shoulders, sunken chests, twisted contortions, and jagged angularities....Grotesque in their deformities, these men and women, who should have been in the full flower of their lives, were already classed among the aged. And old they were in body and spirit.⁸³

Likewise, after three children in as many years, Judith begins to "fade." "She never sang nor romped anymore," and "her face was habitually sullen and heavy, her eyes glazed and turned inward or looking out upon vacancy with an abstracted stare."⁸⁴

Her spirit is broken, and her body has begun to weaken: Some virtue had gone out of her long, muscular arms trained from childhood to do heavy work. Her breath came in short, quick gasps and she felt her knees weaken and tremble in a way that she had never felt before."⁸⁵ Ultimately, Kelley suggests that Judith's "masculine" strength

⁸³ Kelley, *Weeds*, p. 91.

⁸⁴ Kelley, *Weeds*, p. 252, p. 246.

⁸⁵ Kelley, *Weeds*, p. 297.

has been debilitated by the most “feminine” of acts—childbirth. Although she is depicted in the beginning of the novel as a sort of rare genetic exception, as having “better biology,” Kelley suggests that not even the genetically exceptional can withstand the hardships of intense labor and extreme poverty.

Feeble Futures

Both Wharton’s *Summer* and Kelley’s *Weeds* engage with eugenic discourse that imagines national degeneracy through the dysgenic reproduction of the rural poor. Central to eugenic rhetoric was the debate about how best to manage and contain what was perceived as the “indiscriminate breeding” of the so-called unfit or feebleminded. Eugenicists perceived the potential for the use of birth control to curb this hyperbolic reproduction of the poor and working classes. Both Wharton and Kelley draw on the contemporary birth control movement in their representations of attempted abortion in conjunction with their exploration of “dysgenic” families.

Margaret Sanger is perhaps the most well known figure in the twentieth-century birth control movement. Sanger grew up in an Irish immigrant family of 11 children in Corning. Her mother died at 48 as a result of poor health from bearing so many children. While Sanger worked as nurse on the lower east side, she began writing articles to educate women about reproductive health and birth control. By the time she opened her clinic in 1912, she already had a national reputation as a leading proponent of birth control. Sanger founded and edited the *Birth Control Review* in and founded the American Birth Control League in 1922, which eventually became Planned Parenthood. Of course, the birth control movement did not begin with

Sanger. Rather “Voluntary Motherhood” had been a popular cause among first-wave feminists and Free Lovers since the mid nineteenth century.⁸⁶ For the most part, the nineteenth-century movement was interested in making it possible for women to avoid pregnancy, usually by periodic abstinence.

Sanger’s call for the use of contraception marked a break with this earlier movement, as Voluntary Motherhood proponents tended to denounce contraception as “unnatural.” In *Woman and the New Race*, Sanger argues that motherhood must be “set free” by the popularizing of “birth control thinking.” “Motherhood,...when free to choose the time and the number of children who shall result from the union,...refuses to bring forth weaklings; refuses to bring forth slaves....It withholds the unfit, brings forth the fit.”⁸⁷ Her description of motherhood suggests pregnancy is more an act of individual will than sexual reproduction.⁸⁸ She walks a thin rhetorical line between empathizing with the plight of poor rural farmers and their families and endorsing a eugenic program to prevent their reproduction. For instance, Sanger notes that “there were in 1910 more than 2,353,000 tenant farmers, two-thirds of whom lived and worked under...terrible conditions....were always in want, and were compelled by the very terms of the prevailing tenant contracts to produce children who must go to the field and do the work of adults.”⁸⁹ Yet she also employs eugenic rhetoric to link environmental factors such as poverty to biological decline. For instance, she argues that the “handicaps of ill-health, insufficient food, inadequate training and stifling toil”

⁸⁶ Linda Gordon, “Voluntary Motherhood: The Beginning of Feminist Birth Control Ideas in the United States,” in *Women and Health in America*, ed. Judith Walzer Leavitt (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

⁸⁷ Margaret Sanger, *Woman and the New Race*, (New York: Truth Publishing Co., 2008/1920), p. 24.

⁸⁸ In fact, it recalls the parthogenic reproduction in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland*.

⁸⁹ Sanger, *Woman and the New Race*, p. 20.

bring forth “degenerate” and “feebleminded” progeny, in effect conjuring the specter of the disabled body in order to advocate for the widespread availability of birth control. Sanger thus ties women’s need to control their individual bodies with a eugenic commitment to improve national “stock.”

In her later work, *The Pivot of Civilization*, Sanger directly endorses eugenics. She argues that compulsory maternity means that the “Americans of tomorrow” are being produced by the “feebleminded,” who she claims are invariably associated with an abnormally high rate of fertility.”⁹⁰ Furthermore, Sanger argues against charity, which she claims is dysgenic and inflicts injury on the “the future of the race.” Thus, Sanger’s later work marks a shift to a more pronounced focus on the “Americans of tomorrow.” That is, Sanger’s work engages in the culture of biofuturity by imagining the future of the nation inscribed on the bodies of its babies.

Fitter Families and the Mass Culture of Eugenics

By the middle of the 1920s, eugenics had migrated from the realm of medicine and science and into mass culture. Beginning with the decision of the Galton Society to hold the Second International Congress of Eugenics at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, the museum became an overt space of eugenic cultural production. The week-long congress opened on September 21, 1921, and featured eugenic exhibits that included embryological and racial casts and models; pedigree charts and tables that urged visitors to do careful pedigree analysis when

⁹⁰ Margaret Sanger, *The Pivot of Civilization* (Teddington, Middlesex: The Echo Library, 2006/1922), p. 28.

selecting a mate; biological family histories, including “aristogenic” families who were thought to be models of physical, mental, and moral ability; explanations of intelligence tests; lists of states that had legalized sterilization for the so-called feeble-minded; and displays of “Caucasian” and “Negro” fetuses intended to provide physical evidence that race was indeed a biological category.⁹¹ The exhibits remained opened to the public for a month after the congress closed, and received an estimated 5,000 and 10,000 visitors. When the exhibits were dismantled, the U.S. Congress’s Committee on Immigration requisitioned any displays that dealt directly with immigration for use in shaping national policy.

The popularity of eugenics ironically spread to the types of rural communities that Davenport’s ERO was studying. In fact, Davenport’s organization began funding fitter family contests organized by Mary T. Watts and Dr. Florence Brown Sherbon. Watts was a director of the Iowa Parent-Teacher Association and had organized a “Better Babies Contest” in 1911; Sherbon, who specialized in child welfare, was one of the judges. The two women began to collaborate, and after Davenport suggested their evaluation of babies emphasize heredity, they eventually developed baby contests in which the entire family participated. They organized their first such contest, the “Fitter Families for Future Firesides Contest,” for the 1920 Kansas Free Fair, through which they conveyed a message of eugenic reform through racial betterment to primarily rural populations. The contests included exhibits that provided information on family health and encouraged families to examine their genealogies, with the goal

⁹¹ I am relying here on Robert W. Rydell’s *World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Expositions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

of “conceiv[ing] of itself as a genetic unit with a definite obligation to study its heredity and build up its health status.”⁹² According to Rydell, Davenport maintained involvement in the contests, as he considered them important means of popularizing eugenics and collecting data on rural populations.⁹³ The women eventually expanded their eugenic contests and exhibitions to include fairs in Texas, Oklahoma, Georgia, Michigan, Massachusetts, and Arkansas. They also developed an exhibit for Philadelphia Sesquicentennial International Exposition, and even organized a mobile display to better serve rural communities.⁹⁴

To enter a contest, families had to complete “eugenic family histories,” which surveyed the families’ educational, occupational, and social—(religious, political, and other organizational affiliations) backgrounds. All family members had to undergo physical and mental evaluations, including personality measures. Winning families were usually featured in the local newspaper and received a medal with the inscription, “Yea, I have a goodly heritage.”⁹⁵ Families did not have to attend the fairs to participate in these genealogical evaluations. Rather, the ERO made eugenics available to everyone through an “Abridged Record of Family Traits,” which families could complete and send to the ERO to have on record. This mass popularity of eugenics by the mid to late 1920s reveals the way in which the culture of biofuturity had pervaded the national consciousness, to the extent that individuals and families were actively pursuing their elusive genetic knowledge not only to reassure

⁹² Lovett, *Conceiving the Future*, p. 140.

⁹³ Rydell, *World of Fairs*.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Lovett, *Conceiving the Future*.

themselves of their normalcy, but also to imagine that normalcy carried on in the bodies of the nation's future.

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