Fear and desire : miscegenation in the postbellum South
by Christopher Bart Waldrip

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of History
Montana State University
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Abstract:
In 1863, a pamphlet, "Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to American White Man and the Negro," gave birth to an idea: "free" black men sexually desired white women. This idea eventually developed into an ideology and translated into southern white fears of miscegenation. This thesis examines the medium of popular literature and its influence on this ideological development in southern culture. Two southern authors wrote prolifically about miscegenation: Thomas Dixon, whose writings exacerbated white fears, and William Faulkner, whose writings exposed those fears as a negative underpinning of southern culture.

My study is not exclusive to literary theory; it combines historical and literary analyses to show how an ideology affected southern culture. I focus on Dixon's writings from 1903 to 1912 and Faulkner's from 1931 to 1936 and argue that both authors accurately captured the fears' effects. A bulk of my study concentrates on Mississippi; however, it devotes portions to Dixon's native North Carolina and the South as a whole. My major objective is to analyze the evolution of miscegenation from idea to ideology: how white southern culture perceived miscegenation and how fears of miscegenation endured and changed, if they changed at all.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of History

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY-BOZEMAN
Bozeman, Montana

April 1998

N378
W1408

APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

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This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographical style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

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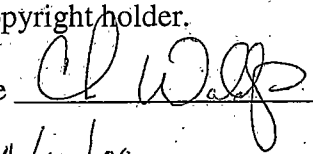
Signature 

Date 4/16/98

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GLOSSARY

Black--Although a great majority of blacks in America are of mixed ancestry, this term applies to those who appeared unmixed. Because black culture and mulatto culture eventually fused together, this term sometimes applies to all those who appear to have unmixed and mixed black ancestry.

Herrenvolk Democracy--A German phrase originally applied to a Nazi ideology, Herrevolk Democracy, as sociologist Pierre L. van den Berghe defined it, means the equal superiority of all who belong to the master race (Herrenvolk) over all those who do not.

Miscegenation--Miscegenation is a broad term that applies to casual sexual relations to cohabitation or marriage between members of different races.

Mulatto--This term applies specifically to a biracial person with half-white ancestry and half-black ancestry. Because the term generally applies to those with any visible mixture of black and white, as it was used in the United States Census from 1850 to 1920, the term broadly applies to those who have any black and white mixture.

Octoroon--This term specifically applies to those with 7/8 white ancestry and 1/8 black.

Poor Whites--During the antebellum period, this phrase pointed to a class of white people who rarely held slaves. The use of this phrase, far from being a political statement, refers to white members of the lower class in the South. Poor whites were also often called "rednecks," and these terms are used interchangeably in the text.

Quadroon--This term applies specifically to whose with 3/4 white ancestry and 1/4 black.

Volksgeistian Conservatism--This term applies to a specific thought-set harbored by some aristocratic southerners that sprang from the conservative tradition after Reconstruction. Believing that God blessed all southern whites with a unique and valuable spirit (Volksgeist), these aristocrats tried to implant

Germanic idealism into southern culture in hopes of creating a more harmonious racial environment.

THESIS ABSTRACT

In 1863, a pamphlet, "Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to American White Man and the Negro," gave birth to an idea: "free" black men sexually desired white women. This idea eventually developed into an ideology and translated into southern white fears of miscegenation. This thesis examines the medium of popular literature and its influence on this ideological development in southern culture. Two southern authors wrote prolifically about miscegenation: Thomas Dixon, whose writings exacerbated white fears, and William Faulkner, whose writings exposed those fears as a negative underpinning of southern culture.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word, "miscegenation," first appeared in December 1863. The term--taken from *miscere*, to mix, and *genus*, race--emerged in an anonymous pamphlet entitled "Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and the Negro." The pamphlet created not only a new word but an ideology that affected southern race relations for the next century: the fear of miscegenation. Disguising the pamphlet as the work of abolitionists, proslavery authors tried to discredit Abraham Lincoln and the Republicans prior to the 1864 elections. Before the pamphlet was revealed as a hoax, many whites became outraged at its major theme: miscegenation ensured American prosperity. The pamphlet asserted that emancipation provided black men not only physical freedom from slavery but sexual freedom to give white women, especially southern white women, what they had always desired--the uninhibited passion and generous endowment of black lovers. As the election drew closer, the charges against Lincoln and his party grew more outlandish. Propaganda reminded hysterical southerners of Lincoln's "Miscegenation Proclamation" and the "Black Republican Prayer," which called upon "the spirit of amalgamation... that we may become a regenerated nation of half-breeds, and mongrels," living "in bonds of

fraternal love, union and equality with the Almighty Nigger, henceforward, now and forever. Amen."[1]

Slavery, as revealed in the 1863 pamphlet, represented not only an economic but also a social foundation for southern society. With society separated along racial lines during slavery, white southerners formed a Herrenvolk Democracy, where, in theory, the commonality of white skin prevented class conflicts between slaveholders and nonslaveholders. Many southerners disliked slavery but deemed it necessary to prevent perceived black sexuality from tainting the Victorian virtues of white society. Although an Alabama farmer, for example, disapproved of slavery, he told Frederick Law Olmsted that emancipation threatened white supremacy: "Now suppose they was free, you see they'd all think themselves just as good as we... How would you like to hev a nigger feelin' just as good as a white man? How'd you like to hev a nigger steppin' up to your darter?"[2]

As with the Alabama farmer, many white southern males perceived the threat of miscegenation accompanying emancipation. However, many of those same white males bore responsibility for miscegenation during slavery. Daily dalliances between

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[1] Forrest G. Wood, Black Scare: The Racist Response to Emancipation and Reconstruction (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), 53-79.

[2] James M. McPherson, Ordeal by Fire: The Coming of War, 2d ed., vol. 1 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 34-36; Nathan Irvin Huggins, "The Deforming Mirror of Truth," Black Odyssey: The African American Ordeal in Slavery (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), xlii; Edmund S. Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975), 328; Herrenvolk Democracy was the equality and common bond of white skin, which took precedence over all other interests.

masters and enslaved women happened since the earliest days in American slavery and became commonplace in the 1850s. The sexual relations between master and slaves perpetuated the existence of mulatto slaves. The progeny from such a relationship always followed the mother's status: if she were a slave, so was her child. Ideologies of sexism and racism dictated that only white men could bed (illegitimately) with black or mulatto women. Within the social constructs of slavery, the master--the primary power of the plantation--tacitly held exclusive rights to interracial affairs. Even the wives of slaveholders, virtually powerless to stop their husbands' philandering, spent their days on the plantation, like diarist Mary Chesnut, "surrounded by prostitutes," recognizing that "the mulattoes one sees in every family exactly resemble the white children."[3]

Indeed, between 1850 and 1860, more and more slaves resembled "the white children." The 1860 United States Census reported an astounding increase in the mulatto population. As the number of slaves in that decade increased by 20 percent, the number of mulattos in slavery rose 67 percent. According to W.E.B. Du Bois's scholarship, even the 1860 census figures fell well below reality because census agents took "mulatto" to mean a person who was visibly half-white.[4]

After slavery crumbled, southern white men, who initiated interracial sex, criticized Reconstruction governments for encouraging miscegenation. Many

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[3]C.Vann Woodward, ed., Mary Chesnut's Civil War (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 29.

[4] W.E.B. Du Bois, ed., Negro American Family (New York: Negro University Press, 1969), 25.

southerners looked upon the utter ruin left by Billy Yank as God's punishment for miscegenation during slavery, and they voiced their disapproval to the Reconstruction legislatures that passed laws sanctioning intermarriage. But the Republicans proceeded to repeal bans on intermarriage and to legitimate existing biracial relationships.[5]

Some scholars believe that during Reconstruction interracial sex soared to unprecedented heights in the South. In Marriage in Black and White, for example, Joseph R. Washington, greatly influenced by the work of famed sociologist Edward B. Reuter, cited six reasons to support his belief that miscegenation increased after the war:

> First, slavery was largely a rural institution where the great bulk of blacks was not in contact with great blocks of whites...Second, slavery taught no code of ethics with respect to sex...Third, the freedom of the blacks to move at will in urban centers increased their contact with whites of all stations and standards. Fourth, personal demoralization and social disorganization of family relations, the mobility and desertion of the husband who had a freedom of movement formerly enjoyed largely by women, provided women with real susceptibility to unstable sex interests of the white male. Fifth, despite the freedom of blacks, the power of whites was still unchallengeable and the intimate associations were 'pretty much at the will of the white man'...Sixth, black women who had been used to the favors only white men could provide did not immediately give up concubinage and the rewards of the status they had achieved in their relationships with white men for what some believed to be the less prestigious relation of marriage to a black man.[6]

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[5] Lerone Bennet, Jr., "Miscegenation in America," Marriage Across the Color Line, ed. Cloyte M. Larsson (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1965), 20; Neil R. McMillen, Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 14-15.

Washington's rationale seems somewhat reasonable, but other evidence refutes his analysis. In fact, miscegenation in the South reached a low point during the war and its aftermath.[7] Certainly love and curiosity stimulated some whites and blacks to brave the color barrier, but these numbers were few. Freedmen withdrew from white communities to live among themselves, creating a level of physical segregation vastly higher than during slavery, and although "slavery taught no code of ethics with respect to sex" for either whites or blacks, most slaves carved their own sense of sexual morality out of their lives and carried it with them into freedom. Moreover, the opportunities that black men had to travel never guaranteed opportunities for sexual experiences with white women. Both Washington and Reuter misinterpreted the census data for 1870 and 1890. Out of 100 percent of total blacks, the rise from 12.0 percent mulatto in 1870 to 15.2 percent mulatto in 1890 probably led both scholars to view Reconstruction as an increased period of interracial sex; actually the figures reflect the offspring between blacks and mulattos.

Other clues can be found in Caroline Bond Day's work. In 1918, she collected a mass of information on black persons divided into two groups. Consisting of 1,152 persons born before 1861, Group I accounted for 243 unions with whites. Conversely, Group II, consisting of 1,385 persons born after 1860, accounted for only 3 unions with whites. Even after considering the flaws in Day's sample, the dramatic drop in

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[6] Joseph R. Washington, Jr., Marriage in Black and White (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 66; Edward Byron Reuter, The American Race Problem (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1966), 131.

[7] Joel Williamson, New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University, 1995), 90.

interracial unions clearly suggests a fundamental change in behavior concerning miscegenation.[8]

The validity of Washington's analysis concerns white men. Despite Republican Party rule, southern white men continued to hold nearly exclusive rights to interracial sex. The "unchallengeable" power of white men still coerced black women into bed and bricked a formidable wall between black men and white women. Surely some white women and black men tried to scale the barrier in both legitimate and illegitimate relations, but in reality, interracial sex most likely decreased as Reconstruction faded. Even as the Republicans sanctioned miscegenation, new white supremacist ideologies began to emerge in Dixie to thwart black "social equality" and to discourage anyone from transcending the color barrier. White men built more walls, supported by a new code of ethics, and after the return of Democratic rule in the mid-1870s, whites instituted a new system of racial control--Jim Crow.

In the post-Reconstruction years, the coils of white supremacy concentrated on interracial proscriptions, constricted around the taboo of interracial sex, and suffocated the opportunities for legal interracial unions. Throughout southern states, phrases like "race purity," "blood will tell," and "race degeneracy" became shibboleths for white supremacists. The fear of "amalgamation," as many whites called it, ran so deeply that Mississippi Democrats made prohibiting interracial marriage their top priority upon returning to power in 1876, eventually securing that

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[8] Caroline Bond Day, A Study of Some Negro-White Families in the United States (Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum of Harvard University, 1932), chap. 3

prohibition in the 1890 constitution.[9] Following Mississippi's lead, all southern states implemented anti-intermarriage codes into their constitutions or civil and criminal codes by 1908.[10]

In the early years of the twentieth century, the rush to outlaw interracial unions was not only a southern phenomenon. Although southern states led the charge, most western states--Montana, Utah, Wyoming, New Mexico, California, Colorado, Arizona, Idaho, Oregon, Nevada, North and South Dakota--and two mid-western states--Nebraska and Indiana--adopted laws banning intermarriage (between whites and blacks) by 1913. Moreover, in 1913 a rash of bills prohibiting black-white marriages came to the floor in the state legislatures of Connecticut, Kansas, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Washington, and Wisconsin. Although the bills were defeated in these states, the attempt to ban intermarriage reflected a nationwide concern about miscegenation.[11]

For the next half-century, fears of miscegenation outside of the South slowly withered away, while they remained deeply rooted in Dixie. Still, in 1968--the year in which the Supreme Court repealed Virginia's anti-intermarriage law in its Loving v. Virginia decision--sixteen states had prohibitions against black-white marriages: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi,

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passim; Herbert G. Gutman, The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976); Williamson, New People, 89.

[9]McMillen, 15; Mississippi Constitution, 1890, art.14, sec. 263.

[10]Louisiana, the last southern state to add anti-miscegenation laws to its civil and criminal code, did so in 1908; Washington, 72-77.

[11] Washington, 69-81.

Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.[12] Oklahoma and West Virginia excluded, every state with anti-intermarriage laws in 1968 also had proslavery constitutions before the Civil War.[13] In fact, Maryland, the only other state that had a proslavery constitution, repealed its laws banning intermarriage in 1967.[14] Recognizing the reputation for racial justice in Chief Justice Earl Warren's Supreme Court, Maryland struck their anti-intermarriage laws from the books as soon as the Supreme Court accepted the Loving case. Unsurprisingly, these southern states also enforced the most severe Jim Crow laws.

Miscegenation existed as Jim Crow's most troubling concern. From the First Reconstruction to the Second Reconstruction in the 1950s and '60s, whites "instinctively" understood that "sex is at the core of life," in Mississippi author David Cohn's words, and in their "conscious or unconscious minds" they knew that the "negro question" was "at bottom a blood or sexual question."[15] White southerners, in effect, suffered from sexual and racial paranoia; they suffered from the fear of miscegenation.

As a topic, miscegenation remains relatively under explored by most scholars studying American race relations. Gary Nash, George Fredrickson, George B. Tindall, Carl Degler, and Nell Painter touch on the subject in their studies, but only Edward B. Reuter, Joseph R. Washington, Naomi Zack, Charles Herbert Stember,

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[12] Ibid, 95.

[13] An Indian Territory before the Civil War, Oklahoma had no slavery. What is now West Virginia had a high concentration of slaves, but that area fell within Virginia's borders prior to the Civil War.

[14] Washington, 95.

and Joel Williamson devote entire works to miscegenation. These scholars provide invaluable research on the politics behind miscegenation, but they rarely confront the idea of miscegenation and its effects on southern culture.

During the preliminary research for this project, several questions concerning the idea of miscegenation in southern culture emerged. How did the idea permeate the minds of white and black southerners? What cultural manifestations resulted from the idea? How did the idea affect southern race relations? To answer these questions, the previously mentioned scholars deserve attention, but, here again, they rarely focus on the idea of miscegenation and how it affected southern culture. Even by relying on their studies, problems would surface. In The Crucible of Race, for example, Joel Williamson asserts that whites "began the practice of lynching as a reaction against the presumed threat of the black beast to white womanhood."[16] Yet, little statistical basis supports his contention. Gunnar Myrdal, James Elbert Cutler, and Walter White of the NAACP published evidence that placed the number of lynching victims accused of sexually assaulting a white woman at approximately 30 percent.[17]

Nevertheless, fear of miscegenation pervaded white southern thought. Lynching was not the only reaction to the fear. Other forms of physical intimidation,

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[15]David L. Cohn, "How the South Feels," Atlantic Monthly, January 1944, 49.

[16]Joel Williamson, The Crucible of Race (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 184.

[17]Gunnar Myrdal, American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy, 2d ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), 562; James Elbert Cutler, Lynch Law: An Investigation into the History of Lynching in the United States (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1905), 176; Walter White, Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 26;

legislation banning miscegenation, and the "one-drop rule"--a rule that defined any person with black ancestry as legally black--reveal the extent of that fear. Perhaps the most significant cultural indicator is the medium of popular literature. For years, southern novelists addressed the cultural problems enshrouding miscegenation. Mark Twain started the tradition with Puddin'head Wilson. Following Twain's example, a pantheon of southern writers--George Washington Cable, Kate Chopin, Ellen Glasgow, Charles Chestnutt--explored themes of miscegenation. Their works steered away from the traditional sentimentality of southern literature and usually displayed the irony of white fears. "But save for these exceptions," as W.J. Cash noted in The Mind of the South, "the literary state of the region was to be accurately measured by Thomas Dixon, Jr."[18]

Raised in the racist atmosphere of Reconstruction North Carolina, Dixon entered Wake Forest in 1879 at sixteen, where he received the highest marks in the school's short history.[19] He then attended Johns Hopkins, where he studied under Herbert Baxter Adams, a man Dixon called a "genius of the highest order."[20] Professor Adams taught his students a Teutonic germ theory that he constructed by combining evolutionary science and Victorian romanticism. According to Adams, a superior intellectual genetic characteristic, which moved from Germany to Britain

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NAACP, Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918 (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 10.

[18] W.J. Cash, The Mind of the South (New York: Vintage Books, 1941), 375.

[19] Raymond Allen Cook, Fire From the Flint: The Amazing Careers of Thomas Dixon (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 1968), 94.

[20] Thomas Dixon, Jr., Southern Horizons: The Autobiography of Thomas Dixon, ed. Karen M. Crowe (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1984), 167.

and then to colonial America, spawned democracy. Traveling through unadulterated whites, it created men who contained the intellect and ambition for self-government.[21] Adams' Teutonic germ theory gave Dixon the scientific basis to buttress the racist foundation he received during his youth. The lessons he learned from Adams soon reverberated in his first novel, The Leopard's Spots: "The future American must be an Anglo-Saxon or a Mulatto! We are now deciding what it shall be...This Republic can have no future if racial lines are broken, and its proud citizenship sinks to the level of a mongrel breed."[22]

Three of Dixon's novels--The Leopard's Spots (1902), The Clansman (1905), and The Sins of the Father (1912)--explicitly dealt with miscegenation. Dixon saw miscegenation as an acute southern problem, but his preoccupation may have reflected a deep personal obsession. The racist theories proliferating throughout his literature suggest that miscegenation affected him personally, even psychologically. After the publication of The Leopard's Spots, a biracial man in New York claimed publicly that Thomas Dixon, Sr. fathered him. When asked to respond to the allegations, Dixon, Jr. replied, "Yes I know that darky, he is always getting himself into trouble and I have helped him a number of times." The reports of Dixon's purported half-brother never reached a scandalous level. But the possibilities of truth

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[21] Peter Novick, That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 87-88; Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 67-68.

may have festered in the author, forcing him, as Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore posits in Gender and Jim Crow, to use his novels as a vehicle to exonerate white men, like his father, and denounce miscegenation.[23]

Dixon's fiction depicted a "mongrel breed" that threatened the southern social order. Defending his native Dixie, the author's attitude embodied the fear: his literature cited the threat of a "mongrel breed" created by black men raping white women and erased the historical memory of white men raping black women during slavery. Dixon's fiction, however, did not stand unchallenged; it initiated a southern literary reaction. The decades of the 1920s and '30s saw an accelerating growth of fiction that argued against Dixon's racist doctrines.

William Faulkner led the way in this movement. Like Dixon, Faulkner devoted a bulk of his work to the problems of miscegenation, but unlike Dixon, Faulkner sloughed off the old southern imperative of using his writing to defend the South. Novels like Light in August (1932) and Absalom, Absalom! (1936) and the short story "Dry September" (1931) revealed the horror and hypocrisy of a culture immersed in Dixonian tradition.

Born and raised in north Mississippi at the dawning of the twentieth century, Faulkner had little formal education. What he learned, he learned through oral history and by observation. Spending most of his life in his native state, he knew Mississippi best and concentrated on miscegenation most. Perhaps the place burdened by the fear

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[22] Thomas Dixon, Jr., The Leopard's Spots: The Romance of the White Man's Burden, 1865-1900 (Ridgewood, NJ: The Gregg Press, 1967), 198.

[23] Gilmore, 68-69.

of miscegenation more than any other was the Mississippi Delta. For its number of lynchings and strident segregation laws, the Delta has been aptly named "the most southern place on Earth."[24] Faulkner saw the muddled colors between jet black and stark white in the white supremacist stronghold of the Delta and throughout Mississippi and recognized that white fears of miscegenation were rooted in the Magnolia State's racial strife. In fact, the roots of racism ran so deeply that fears of miscegenation affected even Faulkner. Although his novels expressed sympathy for blacks and mulattos and condemned white lynch mobs common in Mississippi, Faulkner defended lynching in a 1931 letter to the Memphis Commercial Appeal. In Mississippi, the roots of racism ran deep, deep enough to tap a source of ambivalence in one of America's most racially sensitive authors.

Like Dixon, Faulkner was also haunted by the specter of miscegenation. In the 1850s, William Faulkner's namesake and great-grandfather, Colonel William Faulkner, owned several slaves, all of whom the census agent listed as "black."[25] In 1860, the agent listed all of Col. Faulkner's slaves as "mulatto." As Joel Williamson's scholarship in William Faulkner and Southern History relates, the evidence strongly

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[24] James C. Cobb, The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[25] The Colonel actually spelled his name "Falkner." The author added the "u" to his name after joining the R.A.F. in 1918. To avoid confusion, members of the author's family will be spelled "Faulkner."

suggests that the Colonel had a "shadow family," a mulatto family that mirrored and lived under the shadow of the white family.[26]

Both Dixon and Faulkner painted portraits of southern culture influenced by the reality and fear of miscegenation. By combining literary and historical analyses, this study attempts to set their fictional texts in the proper historical contexts, use their work as a model to define the fear and its psychological effects on southerners, and present the fear's cultural manifestations, especially white supremacist measures--segregation laws, social codes, and racial violence--and the sexual images cast upon blacks and mulattos to support these measures. Stretching from the 1900s to the 1960s, this study focuses on Faulkner's Mississippi but also considers Dixon's North Carolina and the South as a whole. With an understanding that popular literature can indicate the fears of miscegenation experienced in southern culture, this study analyzes the evolution of miscegenation: how white southern culture perceived miscegenation and how the fear of miscegenation endured. This thesis is straightforward: Dixon's novels accurately reflected (and in many ways exacerbated) the fear of miscegenation; Faulkner's novels reveal the persistence of the fear through time. Both authors wrote about the fear of miscegenation. One supported it, the other denounced it. Dixon promoted the fear by encouraging white southerners to believe that lascivious black men held responsibility for a "mongrel breed," whereas Faulkner wrote not only to display the social and cultural effects of the fear but also to show the true origins of Dixon's "mongrel breed."

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[26] Joel Williamson, William Faulkner and Southern History (New York: Oxford

The fear of miscegenation took hold after Emancipation and shaped southern race relations for the next century. During Reconstruction, anti-miscegenation rhetoric rang throughout the South. Many white southerners saw blacks as inherently inferior and thus miscegenation as inherently evil--one of the fundamental reasons the South needed racial segregation. For years, black leaders argued against doctrines of segregation based on racial inferiority. In a 1913 speech entitled "For Old and New Students," for example, Booker T. Washington told the Tuskegee student body that culture, not race, created the differences between blacks and whites. A mulatto himself, Washington saw two problems facing turn-of-the-century southern blacks: white racism and black cultural "backwardness," which strengthened white racism and hindered blacks from making positive advances even in their restricted segregated sphere. New to their relative freedom, Washington claimed that blacks lacked "self-control" and "some of the fundamentals of civilization." Washington's pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps philosophy advised Tuskegee students to use segregation to refine their own values and culture in hopes of one day joining whites in an integrated society.[27] Washington's belief that downtrodden blacks existed as a consequence of environment and not biology soon found a voice at Columbia University.

Franz Boas, a Jewish immigrant who founded the American Anthropological Association and the chair of Columbia's Department of Social Sciences, maintained

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University Press, 1983), 22-29.

[27] Emmett J. Scott and Lyman Beecher Stowe, Booker T. Washington: Builder of a Civilization (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1917), 231.

that "the idea of a 'cultured' individual is merely relative." He used this idea, which he coined as "cultural relativism," to assault racist thought. In the decade following 1910, Boas began cultivating scholars--most of whom were black, immigrant, or female--into a cadre that would eventually dilute the "scientific" racist assumptions of American scholarship and emphasize the sociological and psychological effects of institutionalized racism. By the 1930s, cultural relativism gained increasing acceptance; by the '40s, it influenced much of American public opinion.[28]

As Carl Degler notes, "The Boas influence upon American Society can hardly be exaggerated."[29] Support for Degler's contention comes with understanding the famous Brown v. Board of Education case. In the South, many whites expressed fears of miscegenation in their defense of public school segregation; placing white children and black children in the same classroom, they said, would quickly lead to a southern race of "mongrels."[30] But the nine men who served on the Supreme Court in 1954 disallowed race to serve as a means of legal discrimination. They overturned the "separate but equal" ruling handed down by their predecessors in the Plessy v. Ferguson decision sixty years previously. Boasian thought had weakened the scientific racism--Social Darwinism, eugenics, and pseudo-sciences like

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[28] Dinesh D'Souza, The End of Racism, Principles of a Multicultural Society (New York: FreePress Paperback, 1995), 144.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Albert P. Blaustein and Clarence Clyde Ferguson, Jr., Desegregation and the Law: The Meaning and Effect of the School Segregation Cases (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 3-15.

physiognomy and phrenology--that buttressed segregation.[31] All that was left was culture.

Perhaps if the "separate but equal" theory had existed in reality, then Booker T. Washington might have seen the problem of what he called black cultural "backwardness" remedied. However, white supremacy--the other problem confronting southern blacks in Washington's opinion--continued. White political rule over state governments ensured that blacks facilities never equaled white facilities. This was exactly what the NAACP argued in Brown: the doctrine of "separate but equal" was inherently unequal.

Their argument evidently struck a chord with the nine Supreme Court Justices. On May 17, 1954, Chief Justice Warren announced their decision: "Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other 'tangible' factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunites?" he asked. "We believe that it does." In fine Boasian style, Warren insisted that to separate black children "from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone."[32]White southerners vehemently denounced the Supreme Court as advocating miscegenation, revealing that their fears existed well into the 1950s and '60s.

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[31] Thomas Gosset, Jr., Race: The History of an Idea in America (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963), 59, 401-02.

[32] Blaustein and Ferguson, 120.

Currently in America, popular culture seemingly promotes and encourages multiculturalism, yet the Supreme Court lifted the ban on interracial marriages only thirty years ago.[33] Acknowledging this shift in attitudes and laws, this study endeavors to examine miscegenation as a pervasive idea: how southern culture grappled with the idea, and how the idea endured.

[33] Loving v. Virginia, 388 U.S. 1 (1967).

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

The sexual and social constructs between white men and black women changed little from antebellum to postbellum South. Although the outcome of the Civil War freed black women from the manacles of slavery and thus the overwhelming burdens of satiating their masters, they continued to provide sexual outlets for white men in the Jim Crow South. Black women apparently enjoyed some years of reprieve during and following Reconstruction, but white men soon cast their eyes upon them again.

During Reconstruction, anti-miscegenation fever ran high, and as for interracial sex, southern white men literally practiced what they preached. Whites in these years generally blamed their antebellum fathers for the South's demise: slaveholders fell from grace by tasting the apple of black women.[34] The antebellum white men's indulgence in the forbidden fruit of miscegenation brought Yankees to their land, southerners said. But this attitude soon passed with the entrance of Jim Crow. Whites accused black women of possessing an alluring sexuality and developed myths that turned black women into lascivious animals. Thomas Dixon's racist doctrines perfectly exemplified this development. Dixon saw mulatto and black women as irresistible enchantresses who easily led white men into sin. Thus, he

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[34] Williamson, New People, 87-92.

suggested, segregation was needed to ensure that white men would never again fall from grace.

Twenty years later, William Faulkner's fiction countered Dixon's. If segregation was instituted partially to prevent miscegenation, then it had failed miserably. White men who lambasted miscegenation during the day sneaked to black lovers at night. For Faulkner, "the sins of the father" barely differed from the sins of the son or the grandson. Southern white men in the '20s, '30s, and '40s still used their economic leverage to coerce black women into bed. They still cast racial aspersions and created myths intent on harming black women and salving their own image.

During Reconstruction, many southern white men, assuming the role of protectors of public sexual morality, punished anyone who dared to climb over the color barrier. Disseminating their anxieties about miscegenation, they planted both physical and ideological fear and watched it germinate. By Reconstruction's end, anti-miscegenation thought had bloomed. As Lawrence D. Rice observed, for example, anti-miscegenation grew uncontrollably in Texas after 1879. The Texas press covered every incident of miscegenation with inflamed rhetoric. One Texan at this time declared himself incompetent to serve in a jury hearing a miscegenation case by stating that he encouraged lynching any white men who crossed the line.[35]

The white outcry concerning miscegenation reflected a new defense of the color line. The denouement of the Civil War influenced many white southerners to see miscegenation as the sin of the South, the reason God forsook them during the

war. "It does seems strange that so lovely a climate, and country, with a people in every way superior to the Yankees, should be overrun and destroyed by them," wrote South Carolinian William Heyward during Reconstruction. "But I believe that God has ordered it all, and I am firmly of opinion... that it is the judgement of the Almighty because the human and brute blood have mingled to the degree it has in the slave states."[36] Heyward was not alone. White men who fathered mulattos in the antebellum South symbolized fallen angels, and their offspring symbolized the result of their fall from grace--the defeat and the sin of the South.

So it was in the last decades of the1800s. White southerners, constantly reminded by the mulattos in their presence of their presumed reason for defeat, recognized the threat of miscegenation to any new attempts of maintaining a white supremacist society. Although they tenaciously held to their beliefs in states' rights, whites knew that the ratification of the 14th Amendment demanded federal approval of any new attempts at establishing white supremacy. The South had received sanction for its anti-miscegenation laws in 1877 when the Supreme Court decreed that "marriage as creating the most important relation in life, as having more to do with the morals and civilization of a people than any other institution has always been subject to the control of state legislatures."[37] Many southerners, however, saw anti-miscegenation laws as too flexible. New laws were needed, laws that completely

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[35] Lawrence D. Rice, The Negro in Texas, 1877-1900 (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 148-50.

[36]Williamson, New People, 92.

[37] Allen C. Brownfeld, "Intermarriage and the Court," Commonweal 81, 5 February 1965, 609.

separated the races. To help ensure that white southerners never again fell from grace, strict barriers of segregation were enforced.

To be sure, pervasive thoughts of racial purity alone did not motivate the move toward segregation. Economic as well as biological reasons encouraged whites to separate the races.[38] Many Democrats used blacks as a scapegoat for the South's economic woes, claiming that blacks were "absolutely unfit" for participation in a capitalist economy and their unabated economic participation had pulled the South into depression.[39] Biologically, however, segregation depended on definitions of white and black. With the high numbers of mulattos in the South, the definitions for white and black were not cut-and-dried during the post-Reconstruction years. In fact, because of mulattos, the legal definitions evolved in the 1890s. In 1895, South Carolina defined black as having "one-eighth or more negro blood." Similarly, almost all the southern states had marginal definitions ranging from one-quarter to one-sixteenth black ancestry.[40]

The Plessy v. Ferguson decision changed everything. With its Plessy decision in 1896, the Supreme Court again sanctioned the South's attempts to establish white supremacy. Homer Plessy challenged the Jim Crow statute that required racially segregated seating on trains in interstate commerce in Louisiana. Plessy maintained

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[38]C. Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow, 3d ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

[39] Ibid., 73-81.

[40] South Carolina Constitution, 1895, art. 3, sec. 33; Mississippi Constitution, 1890, art. 14, sec. 263; Tennessee Constitution, 1896, art. 11, sec. 14; Florida Constitution, 1892, art. 16, sec. 24.

that his seven-eighths white ancestry entitled him to ride in the seats reserved for whites. The Court, however, denied Plessy of that privilege, taking "judicial note" that a black was someone with any black ancestry.[41] The Plessy ruling literally gave the South a new legal definition for segregation enforcement. The definition for black became the "one-drop rule." No longer would South Carolina define blacks as persons with one-eighth black ancestry; the Plessy decision portended the one-drop rule in the Palmetto State. No longer would southern states adhere to their marginal definitions of black; the Plessy decision foretold the one-drop rule in most southern states.[42]

A new crop of racist southern leaders sprouted in the South to implement the new definition of blackness. Political leaders like Ben "Pitchfork" Tillman from South Carolina and James "The White Chief" Vardaman from Mississippi emerged to preach about the horrors of "race degeneracy."[43] With the strict racial barrier and the one-drop rule, the fear of "passing" came to fruition. The rhetoric in turn-of-the-century newspapers, pamphlets, and speeches announced the threat of "passing as white" or "invisible blackness." The antebellum "curse" their fathers had created still haunted white southerners. Mulattos with physically unidentifiable traces of black

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[41]Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896); F. James Davis, Who Is Black?: One Nation's Definition (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 8-9; Brook Thomas, ed., Plessy v. Ferguson: A Brief History with Documents (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997), ch. 2 passim.

[42]South Carolina, Civil Code, 1902; Arkansas, Revised Statues, Annotated (Kerby, 1904); Alabama Constitution, 1901, sec. 102.

[43]Williamson, Crucible of Race, chap. 4; William F. Holmes, The White Chief: James Kimble Vardaman (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State Press, 1970), 89; Woodward, Strange Career of Jim Crow, 71.

ancestry could easily infiltrate their white world. With the obvious advantages of passing for white, mulattos, whites believed, quietly slipped over the line. As Williamson relates, the fear of invisible blackness fundamentally changed the social constructs of southern society. "The identification of newcomers in a community was always important.... [in the South], but as blackness disappeared beneath white skins and white features, it became vastly more so." Williamson also noted that marriage "became a much more crucial juncture in one's life. What if your son or daughter should, indeed, 'marry one,' all unknowing and unawares?"[44] Just as in Kate Chopin's 1899 short story, "Desiree's Baby," the mistake became apparent only after a newborn child appeared "cursed with the brand of slavery."[45]

Although whites initially blamed their forefathers for afflicting southern society with the curse of miscegenation, they slowly transferred their resentment to black and mulatto women. They still maintained that white men fell from grace, precipitating the pestilence of "mixed breeds" upon the South, but they were tempted by the forbidden fruit of the sensual black or mulatto woman.

Beliefs of prurient black women had existed since the earliest contact between black and white peoples. In The White Man's Burden, Winthrop Jordan quoted English travelers who met "hot constitution'd Ladies" in Africa "with a temper hot and lascivious, making no scruple to prostitute themselves to the Europeans for a very

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[44]Williamson, New People, 103.

[45]Kate Chopin, The Awakening and Selected Short Stories (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 181.

slender profit, so great is their inclination to white men."[46] These beliefs transcended three centuries and crossed an ocean. As southern whites saw her, the mulatto woman of the early 1900s inherited "the hot and lascivious" temper from blacks and some, not all, of the intellect from whites. This lethal combination spelled trouble for unsuspecting white men: the mixture of sexual and intellectual traits made mulatto women irresistible seductresses. Perhaps no person embraced this image more deeply than Baptist minister and novelist, Thomas Dixon.

In his first book, The Leopard's Spots, Dixon expressed his views on the one-drop rule and the dangers of race mixing through Reverend John Durham, a fictional Baptist minister. "One drop of negro blood makes a negro," declared Durham. "It kinks the hair, flattens the nose, thickens the lip... and lights the fires of brutal passions." For Durham, the future of the nation depended on racial inequality, because the "beginning of Negro equality as a vital fact is the beginning of the end of this nation's life." The "fires of passion" running through mulatto veins necessitated segregation, because, as Durham believed, "There is enough Negro blood here to make mulatto the whole Republic."[47]

With her seductiveness, the mulatto woman posed a problem for Dixon. She easily lured good white men into bed and error. Thaddeus Stevens, as Dixon believed, fell under the control of such a mulatto temptress. Stevens, represented as

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[46] Winthrop D. Jordan, The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 19.

[47] Thomas Dixon, The Leopard's Spots, 244.

[48] Thomas Dixon, The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan (Ridgewood, NJ: The Gregg Press, 1967), book 2, ch. 1.

Honorable Austin Stoneman in Dixon's second novel The Clansman, let down his guard and allowed his mulatto maid to influence the reconstruction of the nation. In The Clansman, Dixon devoted a chapter entitled "The First Lady of the Land" to the mulatto maid's supposed influence.[48]

After the assassination of Lincoln, Stoneman, "the Radical leader of Congress," wielded his political power over the South with Lydia Brown, "a strange brown woman of sinister animal beauty and the restless eyes of a leopardess." One night at dinner, Stoneman appointed Silas Lynch, one of his dinner guests and a mulatto with the "head of a Caesar and the eyes of the jungle," as governor of South Carolina. "Lydia had called Stoneman's attention to this man, Silas Lynch." With Stoneman seated at the head of the table and Lynch seated to his left, Lydia "took her seat opposite Stoneman and presided over this curious group with the easy assurance of conscious power."[49]

According to Dixon, Lydia caused the "reign of terror" over the post-war South. "No more curious or sinister figure ever cast a shadow across the history of a great nation than did this mulatto woman in the most corrupt hour of American life." Lydia's "sleek tawny face" and "catlike eyes" had seduced Stoneman into "gripping the Nation by the throat." "Did [Stoneman] aim to make this woman the arbiter of [the nation's] social life," Dixon questioned, "and her ethics the limit of its moral law?"[50]

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[49] Ibid., 79, 93, 94.
[50] Ibid., 94.

For Dixon, the results of Reconstruction had answered these questions. Stevens had eaten the forbidden fruit, which dulled his moral integrity and clouded his political judgement. Under the hypnotic spell of his mulatto maid, Stevens unleashed horror and degradation upon war-torn Dixie. But Dixon did not entirely blame Stevens for his Reconstruction policies. Although Stevens--like so many white southern men--fell from grace, he was, after all, rendered powerless to the temptation of the alluring mulatto woman.

Dixon reemphasized the theme of seductive mulatto women in a later novel, The Sins of the Father. (Even the title suggests what many southerners maintained as the sin of the South.) In its pages, Dixon admitted that slave owners had sex with slaves, but he heaped blame on mulatto and ultimately black women for tempting white men.

As the story goes, Major Daniel Norton of the Confederacy returned home from the Civil War, married a respectable white woman, and fathered a son, Thomas. His wife, unfortunately, suffered a wound near her jugular from thrashing during the pain of labor. The wound threatened to cause fatal damage, but under the attentive care of the faithful black Mammy, death was temporarily avoided. All was well for the Nortons until the beautiful young octoroon, Cleo, was hired to help around the house. Cleo tried to seduce Norton once at his office; however, his remarkable resistance to temptation won, and he fired her. In her persistence, Cleo later entered the Norton home again to assist Mammy after Mrs. Norton got a chill. Norton returned home to find Cleo playing with the baby, and in the presence of both his

wife and the octoroon, only Cleo aroused him. Cleo's "cheeks were flushed, eyes sparkling and red hair flying in waves of fiery beauty over her exquisite shoulders, every change of attitude a new picture of graceful abandon, every movement of her body a throb of savage music from a strange seductive orchestra hidden in the deep woods!" Norton, entranced by Cleo's "fiery beauty," succumbed to temptation.[51]

Mrs. Norton soon discovered her husband's infidelity, but other characters beseeched her not to blame Norton. The doctor who came to calm Mrs. Norton's hysterics assured her that with "that young animal playing at your feet in physical touch with your soul and body in the intimacies of your home, you never had a chance." Mrs. Norton even learned that her father died embracing a mulatto after her mother called to console her. Her mother intimated that Norton "isn't bad. He carried in his blood the inheritance of hundreds of years of lawless passion." After her mother's exoneration, Mrs. Norton saw herself as a "foolish wife," who "brought a beautiful girl into her husband's house and then repented the folly." Although she finally forgave him, Mrs. Norton suffered a relapse and in her dying breath pleaded with her husband to "rear our boy free from the curse." [52]

Just as in The Clansman--and as whites believed, real life--the repercussions of the "sins of the father" carried over into the following generation. Cleo bore Norton's daughter. Norton, threatened by the symbolic presence of his fall from grace, sent his daughter away but allowed Cleo to stay as house servant, because his

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[51] Thomas Dixon, The Sins of the Father: A Southern Romance (New York: Appelton, 1912), 79-80.

[52] Ibid., 123, 134, 137, 162.

motherless son loved her dearly. For two decades, Norton and Cleo lived together in constant bitterness. Then, while Norton traveled throughout North Carolina campaigning to disfranchise blacks, Cleo invited her daughter to the house. Without knowing she was black or his half-sister, Thomas fell in love with her. The couple secretly married before Norton returned. Upon discovering his children's marriage, Norton confessed everything to his son, and horrified by thoughts of incest and miscegenation, they agreed to a suicide pact. Norton succeeded, but Cleo saved Tom by disclosing that Norton's real daughter died at birth: Cleo had taken in a white foundling as her daughter's substitute; thus Tom Norton's wife was neither black nor his sibling, and the marriage was saved.[53]

By one reading, The Sins of the Father condemned white men who practiced miscegenation in antebellum Dixie. Norton's mistake led to the death of his wife and eventually himself. As Gilmore maintains, Dixon never knew the truth behind the allegations of the biracial man in New York. He never consciously held his father responsible, so he created a fictional father who committed suicide.[54] The suicide freed both the fictional and nonfictional Thomas from the taint of racial impurity.

A closer reading, however, reveals that the novel damned mulatto and black women more than white men. Dixon explained Norton's infidelity with sympathy. Norton rightfully endeavored to disfranchise blacks but fell under Cleo's spell, because the "history of the South and the history of slavery made such a paradox inevitable. The long association with the individual negro in the intimacy of home life

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[53]For another synopsis of The Sins of the Father, see Gilmore, 69.

had broken down barriers of personal race repugnance."[55] While Norton's lust seemed natural, Cleo's lust appeared supernatural.[56] She had "the sinister purpose of a mad love that had leaped full grown from the deeps of her powerful animal nature."[57] Dixon absolved white men and blamed mulatto women. Because of the nature of slavery, white men accepted sexual invitations from black women. Because women with any black ancestry had an "animal nature," white men could easily fall prey to the sexual predators again.[58] Because miscegenation doomed the South before, during, and after the Civil War, the South needed to separate the races completely to prevent racial mixing in the 20th century.

In summary, The Sins of the Father promoted segregation. For Dixon, Cleo's seven-eighths white blood meant less than her one-eighth black blood. Her supernatural libido survived through her slight black ancestry, and it ultimately ruined Norton. Dixon saw black women like Cleo as possessing irresistible charm and a wanton desire for white men. To protect future white men from black women, the South needed segregation. Even more threatening than Cleo was her supposed daughter. Norton--and even his son temporarily--believed that Thomas's wife had one-sixteenth black ancestry. The possibility of her black ancestry represented "invisible blackness," and Thomas's near suicide symbolically posed the question:

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[54]Ibid., 70.
[55] Dixon, The Sins of the Father, 36.
[56] Gilmore, 70.
[57] Ibid., 42.

"What if your son or daughter should, indeed, 'marry one,' all unknowing and unawares?"[59]

In the first half of the 20th century, "invisible blackness" created a deep anxiety in white southerners. Most whites, many of whom could not confirm their own racial ancestry, perceived passing as white as the primary threat to white supremacy. With the growing rift between black and white, one's racial identity, and thus racial ancestry, assumed increasing importance. Whites knew of examples where mulattos crossed the color line: the famous mulatto author Charles Chesnutt admitted to passing as white on frequent trips to North Carolina; Walter White, a blonde-haired, blue-eyed mulatto who worked for the NAACP, passed over the color line to investigate lynching throughout the South.[60] If they could do it, anyone could. Indeed, White estimated that about 12,000 mulattos passed annually.[61] Although even these numbers were inflated, many southern alarmists estimated that anywhere from 20,000 to 30,000 passed annually. The tension of "invisible blackness" became so pervasive that even whites associating with or showing sympathy towards blacks were sometimes accused of having black ancestry.[62]

By the 1930s the trend had reversed. White southerners, believing a decade before that thousands of mulattos annually crossed over the color line, began saying that "passe blanc," as they called it in New Orleans, had ended. In 1932, William

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[59] Williamson, New People, 103.

[60] Williamson, New People, 101; Walter White, A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White (New York: Viking Press, 1948), 3.

[61] White, 11; Davis, 56.

Watts Ball, the dean of newspaper editors in South Carolina, trumpeted that "the South is on its guard!" He joined others in declaring that the defense of Jim Crow over the previous forty years had sensitized white southerners to recognize even the remotest sign of blackness.[63]

Staunch racists who assumed political power around the turn of the century deserve recognition for putting "the South...on its guard." In Mississippi, for example, James Kimble Vardaman--representing the state's "redneck" or "poor white" contingent--surged into power and publicly vilified blacks and miscegenation, much to the pleasure of his "redneck" supporters. Before Vardaman, lower-class whites rarely utilized what little political influence they had. The years immediately following Reconstruction saw southern aristocrats control state governments throughout the South. Before black disfranchisement, the aristocrats used the threat of black political power to wheedle votes from lower class whites, reminding them that blacks might combine with some "outside" faction and outvote them. Simultaneously, aristocrats also gathered black votes by playing on their fears of "rednecks." For three decades following Reconstruction, this political maneuvering elected paternalistic, aristocratic governors like Mississippi's John M. Stone, Robert Lowery, Anselm J. McLaurin, and Andrew W. Longino.[64]

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[62] Davis, 56.

[63] Williamson, New People, 105.

[64] Albert D. Kirwan, Revolt of the Rednecks (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1951), 18; John Ray Skates and David G. Sansing, Mississippi Life: Past and Present (Jackson, MS: Magnolia Publishing, 1980), 144.

After the Constitution of 1890 paved the way for black disfranchisement, Mississippi's aristocrats began losing their power. Mississippi, "a pioneer" of disfranchisement, as C. Vann Woodward put it, started a chain-reaction throughout the South. Mississippi's poll tax and literacy tests gave other southern states the scheme they needed to prevent blacks from voting. "Other states elaborated the original scheme and added devices of their own contriving," and by 1910, South and North Carolina, Alabama, Virginia, Georgia, and Oklahoma had effectively decimated the black vote.[65] Throughout the South, poor whites turned their concerns from black political power to blacks themselves and to the aristocrats who usually employed or protected blacks. Black disfranchisement gave way, in Joel Williamson's words, to "the rise of the Radicalism," a school of thought that envisioned "new" blacks as retrogressing into a natural state of savagery. Radical leaders like politician Benjamin Ryan Tillman, women's rights advocate Rebecca Latimer Felton, and minister and writer Thomas Dixon, Jr. insisted that no place existed for blacks in the future American or southern society.[66]

James K. Vardaman also belonged to the Radical mold. By the turn of the century, Vardaman, a product of the Delta, had watched the aristocratic minority rule politically for much of his life, but he knew how to usurp their power. Aristocrats, like William Alexander Percy, saw Vardaman as a "vain demagogue unable to think," but poor whites hailed him as their "White Chief" who would lead them into the

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[65] Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow, 83-85.
[66] Williamson, The Crucible of Race, 6, 7, 11-149.

capitol.[67] Vardaman employed a hard-shelled racism that garnered support from poor whites; he rarely missed an opportunity to encourage whites to protect white supremacy, even if it meant using physical force. In 1904, Vardaman's racial rhetoric paid dividends: he won the gubernatorial race by a landslide.[68] Vardaman's victory symbolized a temporary end to the political power of the paternalistic aristocrats. Since Reconstruction, the "educated" and the "ignorant" had engaged in a political struggle centered on blacks. Vardaman and the "ignorant" had won a battle, but the aristocrats had not lost the war.

The political fight soon shifted into a struggle to influence popular thought. Vardaman believed that to keep power from blacks--who made up almost 60 percent of Mississippi's total population--he constantly needed to remind whites of black inferiority. A major issue for Vardaman was miscegenation. Personally convinced that blacks belonged to an inferior race, he feared that miscegenation debased whites, the superior race. Whites needed to maintain their racial integrity, because race played the vital role in human development. Of course, one way to encourage racial integrity was through strict segregation. But Vardaman understood that a legal barrier to inhibit miscegenation--segregation--meant little without the popular white belief that miscegenation was fundamentally wrong. Thus, Vardaman gained control of a prominent Jackson paper, The Issue, and flooded Mississippi with anti-miscegenation propaganda. Under his influence, The Issue ran weekly articles such as "Sexual Crimes Among Southern Negroes Scientifically Considered,"

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[67] Percy, 143.

"Cannibalism in Hayti," and "The Negro a Different Kind of Flesh." One author Vardaman used was his good friend and fellow radical Thomas Dixon Jr.[69]

A strong aristocratic contingent challenged the influence in the sphere of popular thought of Vardaman and Radicals like him. Some aristocrats, using paternalism bequeathed to them by their ancestors, cared for blacks and sought to raise them into "civilization." Because the white majority thwarted original efforts to "civilize" blacks, these aristocrats turned to elevating the "civility" of whites who foiled their initial attempts. Williamson refers to these aristocrats as "Volksgeistian Conservatives." His term aptly describes these aristocrats: first, they believed that God graced all southern whites with a unique and valuable spirit, a "Volksgeist"; second, they directly applied Hegelian idealism to southern culture; and third, their movement derived from the southern conservative racial tradition--those who harbored paternalistic sentiments toward blacks. Williamson claims that the Volksgeistians "came to rule the modern Southern world, not only in race, but in economics, politics, education, religion, courts of law, prisons, medicine, public health, philanthropy, journalism, folklore, and literature."[70] Although Williamson's description of the Volksgeistians falls into hyperbole--the loss of political power by these aristocrats, for example, eventually propelled them to find a new social agenda outside the political realm--he correctly asserted that they profoundly impacted southern culture. The Volksgeistians attempted to establish a more harmonious racial

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[68]Holmes, 89-109.
[69] Ibid., 37, 196-198.
[70] Ibid., 414-445.

environment by influencing southern whites to accept paternalistic attitudes through education.

The work of Edgar Gardner Murphy relates the early effort of Volksgeistian Conservatism. Murphy, an Episcopal priest, began his efforts to improve southern race relations in 1900, the year after lynching peaked in the South. Murphy organized a "Southern Society" to study race problems. The society soon organized a "Race Conference." Bringing a pantheon of southerners together, Murphy presided over the conference, asked Booker T. Washington to speak, and admitted several hundred blacks to hear Washington's words. Murphy declared the conference a huge success, but acknowledged that southern race relations demanded more attention, prompting him to write the Problems of the Present South in 1904. [71]

In Problems of the Present South, Murphy argued that southern whites needed to nurture and encourage blacks. "If any race is to live it must have something to live for," he insisted. A desire for miscegenation came naturally to southern blacks, according to Murphy, because whites suppressed the "racial integrity" of blacks, making their "world wholly synonymous with degeneration...the world of the white man is the only generous and honorable world which [blacks] know." After blacks climbed the ladder of self-worth, Murphy predicted, a synthesis of black and white

[71] Ibid., 415-417; Hugh C. Bailey, Edgar Gardner Murphy, Gentle Progressive (Miami, FL: University of Miami Press, 1968), 1-10.

cultures would create in the South a life in which "its unity is truer and richer because [it is] not run in one color or expressed in monotony of form."[72]

Murphy also argued that the South must give latitude to aristocratic leaders. As Murphy saw it, an upper class that possessed a moral responsibility toward the lower-classes graced Southern society. They had a noblesse oblige, a paternalistic attitude that slavery created and Reconstruction refined. Paternalism existed as "the noble and fruitful gift of the old South to the new, a gift brought out of the conditions of an aristocracy, but responsive and operative under every challenge in the changing condition of the later order." The paternalistic idealism was, to quote Murphy, "personified in Lee." Robert E. Lee, a paragon of the Old South, shouldered responsibility for the South's loss with honor and never begrudged the North or blacks. After the war, Lee focused on education, becoming the president of Washington College. [73]

Like Lee, latter-day paternalists focused on southern education. Education in the South had lagged behind the North and West in the 19th century, but by 1900 the South realized the ideal of mass public education. Murphy claimed that descendants of the Old South who held tightly to the values of their paternalistic forebears staffed the schoolhouses, and in the schools, they instilled white children, rich and poor, with the virtues of southerners like Lee.[74]

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[72] Edgar Gardner Murphy, Problems of the Present South: A Discussion of Certain Educational, Industrial and Political Issues in the Southern States (New York: Macmillan, 1904), 34-35, 274.

[73] Ibid., 46-50.

[74] Ibid., 20.

In Crucible of Race, Williamson affirms that Murphy's analysis proved true. The Volksgeistians played an important role in promoting education in both private and public schools. At the college level, for example, Vanderbilt, Johns Hopkins, Wake Forrest, Trinity College (Duke), the University of the South, Virginia, South Carolina, and North Carolina--all felt Volksgeistian influence in the 20th century.[75] The flowering of Old South paternalism in the New South produced writers like W.J. Cash and Ellen Glasgow who incorporated Volksgeistian thought into their texts.[76]

Volksgeistian Conservatism also touched William Faulkner. Although he came of age in Mississippi while Vardaman was governor, Faulkner seemed to support Volksgeistian thought. The Faulkner family held an aristocratic tradition since William's great-grandfather, Colonel William Faulkner, arrived in Mississippi about 1842. As mentioned earlier, the Colonel left more than an aristocratic legacy: he left mulatto descendants. After his wife, William's great-grandmother, died in 1847, the Colonel took up with one of his slaves, Emiline Lacy Faulkner. After Emancipation, Emiline stayed with the Colonel until his death. She died in 1898, leaving several children. As Joel Williamson reveals in Faulkner in Southern History, some mulatto descendants of the Faulkner line moved to Texas, and some moved to Baltimore and still live there today.[77] But many black Faulkner families apparently still live in New Albany, William Faulkner's birthplace. While researching Mississippi, Anthony Walton, who calls himself "a black man," recalled his mother

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[75] Williamson, The Crucible of Race, 423-449.
[76] Ibid., 4, 437, 452-53, 459.
[77] Williamson, Faulkner and Southern History, 41-69.

asking about William Faulkner. "She was taking a night-school course and wanted to write about the Nobel laureate from her hometown, New Albany." Walton encouraged his mother to write about Richard Wright, James Baldwin, or Zora Neale Hurston, but his mother informed him that "We're kin to some Faulkners." He laughed and told her that "*this* Faulkner was white." His mother simply smiled and retorted, "So?"[78] This exchange with his mother planted in Walton a growing awareness of the fine gradations of racial complexity in Mississippi and throughout the South. William Faulkner had this awareness concerning his own family and perhaps coupled it with his family's aristocratic tradition to accept Volksgeistian Conservatism.

The 1948 novel Intruder in the Dust reveals the strong Volksgeistian influence in Faulkner's work. In the story, a young white boy named Charles "Chick" Mallison joined an old spinster of the antebellum aristocracy named Miss Habersham to save a mulatto, Lucas Beauchamp, from a lynch mob. The plot itself reflected Volksgeistian thought: Miss Habersham imbued Chick with Old South paternalism, and both of them sought to save a mulatto--the ideal representation of Edgar Gardner Murphy's synthesis of white and black culture in the South. After their success in saving Beauchamp, Gavin Stevens, an idealist lawyer and Chick's uncle, waxed in fine Volksgeistian fashion on the fusion of black and white southerners: "We--he and us--should confederate: swap him the rest of the economic and political and cultural privileges which are his right, for the reversion of his capacity to wait and endure and

[78] Anthony Walton, Mississippi: An American Journey (New York: Alfred A.

survive." Then the South would rise to its former glory. "Then we would prevail; together we would dominate the United States; we would present a front not only impregnable but not even to be threatened" by Northerners who have little in common "save a frantic greed for money and a basic fear of a failure of national character which they hide from one another behind a loud lipservice to a flag."[79]

Steven's appeal for a confederation of black and white southerners revealed Faulkner's adherence to Volksgeistian Conservatism. In Intruder in the Dust, the author echoed Murphy's aspirations detailed in Problems of the Present South. Murphy hoped for a southern culture expressed not "in one color or...in monotony of form." Similarly, Faulkner hoped for a fusion of cultures, personified in Lucas Beauchamp and idealized by Gavin Steven's desire to "confederate."

William Faulkner had explored the idea of miscegenation--a form of black and white fusion--long before Intruder in the Dust. In the '30s, the same decade that William Watts Ball posited that whites knew a mulatto when they saw one, Faulkner asserted precisely the opposite. In Light in August, Faulkner introduced Joe Christmas, a character who never knew his true racial identity. Christmas was the progeny of a rebellious southern white girl and a carnival man of a darker hue. The crux for Christmas concerned the unknown race of his father. His father could have had black, Mexican, and/or white ancestry, but Christmas never knew for sure.

Christmas meandered aimlessly back and forth across the color line throughout the South, eventually settling in Jefferson, Mississippi. Jefferson--

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Knopf, 1996), 6-7.