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Ambivalence of Origins

Interim Editor: Maythee Rojas

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Editor's Notes

Since the passing of two high-profile state legislative bills aimed at Arizona's Latino residents this past April, the significance of ethnicity for American citizens has once again surfaced as a topic for national debate. Whether to legitimize, or just as frequently deny, what defines American identity, the question and meaning of one's ethnic roots continues to be a contested matter for many Americans. In particular, HB 2281, a bill targeting the restriction of ethnic studies curricula in Arizona's K-12 educational system, has prompted accusations that Ethnic Studies scholarship and teachings work against a unified sense of nationhood by encouraging separatism and anti-American sentiment. Yet, as most Ethnic Studies proponents would counter, it is instead the artificial notion of a monolithic American identity, predicated upon a hegemonic rendering of what it is to be an American, that promotes divisions and distrust within a nation. In either case, the ambivalence over how to read the ambiguities of race and ethnicity implicit in U.S. citizenry underscore the ongoing need to address them. As such, the six authors featured in this issue provide fresh and thoughtful examinations of how race and ethnicity complicate understandings of self. Although diverse in content, the articles collectively consider the effects of how the ambivalence of ethnic origins both expand and challenge the meaning of American identity.

In the first three articles, authors explore the possibilities and renewals created through ethnic diversity. Matthew Miller's "Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*: The Recuperation of Identity" tracks the introspective journey of Franklin "Doc" Hata, the novel's protagonist, a Japanese-raised Korean living in the U.S. Miller posits that the novel provides a rare look into a character experiencing multiple levels of Otherness and is ripe for examining the interrelated experiences

of ethnicity and immigration within transnational and postcolonial contexts. Focusing his analysis around the concept of recuperation, Miller contends that Hata's remembering of past experiences where his sense of identity was compromised by how his ethnicity was perceived within different geographical locations forces Hata to eventually have a personal and cultural reconnection to the body and to memory. This process, in turn, leads to a profound physical and psychological "healing." In "Pachucos, Chicano Homeboys and Gypsy *Caló*: Transmission of a Speech Style," MaryEllen Garcia traces the linguistic relationship between the argot or *caló* of the Spanish gypsies to the pachuco gangs of the 1940's whose lifestyles and marginalized status were held in common. Focusing on the two groups' subversive use of language, Garcia suggests that the *caló* speech style serves the meta-linguistic purpose of indexing a group identity that is ideologically defiant of social and linguistic norms for the Chicano gang member. Words from traditional pachuco *caló*, she further finds, are still employed by the greater Chicano community today and serve as symbols of its defiant past and ethnicity. Kabria Baumgartner's "*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Education and Abolition*" argues that Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative should be read alongside her public activities as an abolitionist and educator. Specifically, she notes the text's dialogical ability to teach white Northern women how to abolish slavery and achieve racial equality throughout the United States. The article examines the various educational moments that appear in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and then uses those moments to explore Jacobs' role in the abolition movement as well as her impetus to open her own school, the Jacobs Free School in Alexandria, Virginia in 1864. These experiences, suggests Baumgartner, illustrate how African American women were key to the development of education as an ideal in antebellum America.

The last three essays in this issue address the conflicts and limitations for individuals at odds with conventional understandings of their ethnic origins. In her article, "George Schuyler, Black and Conservative," Helen Lock recalls the contradictory life of African American writer and political figure George Schuyler, whose desire to be embraced by a mainstream American audience led him to frequently reject the influences of African American culture. Lock explores the contradictions that his stance generated by analyzing Schuyler's satirical novel *Black No More* and discussing the ambivalent relationship he held with his biracial daughter, Philippa. Susan Miyo Asai critically examines the influence of popular American music on West Coast *Nisei* (second generation Japanese Americans) as it relates to the formation of their ethnic identities growing up during WWII. Contextualized against the "complex intersection of America's racialized ideology toward immigrants, California's virulent anti-Asian agitation, and the economic and political power struggles between the United States and Japan in gaining dominance of the Pacific region," Asai's study considers how her interviewees negotiated these obstacles and nevertheless developed American identities, which the popular music of their time helped shape. As Asai discovers, her interviewees' experiences demonstrate creative and subversive expressions of self that undermine "the treatment of citizens considered inassimilable and considered a threat in times of political conflict and impending war." Finally, in "If You're Black, Get Back!" The Color Complex: Issues of Skin-Tone Bias in the Workplace," recipient of NAES's 2008 Cortland Auser Undergraduate Student Paper Award Letisha Engracia Cardoso Brown describes the nature of her forthcoming study on the color-biased attitudes developed during the American slave era and how they impact the lives of black women today. Citing the effects of colorism, or skin tone bias, in determining certain aspects of socioeconomic

life, such as income, education, and marriage, Brown sets out to interview contemporary Black women and chart how colorism has affected their lives.

In all, the articles represented in this issue encourage readers to view the complications surrounding ethnic origins not as problems that should be erased or ignored, but rather as rich complexities that can move us toward more fluid and comprehensive ways of understanding each other.

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Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*: The Recuperation of Identity

**Matthew Miller
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In Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*, the elderly, well-respected and fastidious Franklin "Doc" Hata begins an introspective journey toward a revitalized and reimagined identity. For Lee, this journey affords the chance to address ethnicity and immigration under a unique transnational context. The novel chronicles how an identity can be recuperated (i.e., healed) through personal and cultural reconnections to the body and to memory. I purposefully use the word "recuperate" in both the traditional and theoretical senses. "Recuperation" results from Hata's moving back into his past to grow forward in self. Simultaneously, he "heals" his self, physically and psychologically, from various "afflictions" he endures. By exploring Hata's various afflictions against the novel's ways to counteract these ailments, I will show how Lee's novel becomes a narrative of recuperation and identity change.

In his most powerful portrayal of the Asian American immigrant, *A Gesture Life*, Chang-rae Lee creates a

character with multiple levels of Otherness: a transplanted Korean identifying himself as Japanese transplanted in America. These multilayered complications of identity make Hata's character ex-centric to the familiar paradigms of Asian American theory. Indeed, Young-Oak Lee locates this character within a postcolonial diagram: Hata is at once a colonizer and the colonized in an American territory of conflicted identities. Not quite in and not quite out, Hata, the successful businessman and yellow invader, still does not belong to America.¹ Other critics and reviewers tend to evoke ideas of the limen when discussing identity and its construction in *A Gesture Life*. David Cowart describes Hata, a first generation American immigrant character, as living in an American limbo. He becomes neither "ethnic prima materia" nor "American alloy" (Cowart 80).² In an interview from the *New York Times*, Lee explains his artistic investment: "'I'm interested in people who find themselves in places, either of their choosing or not, and who are forced to decide how best to live there. That feeling of both citizenship and exile, of always being an expatriate—with all the attendant problems and complications and delight'" (Garner).³ Franklin Hata perhaps translates his out-of-place existence into several physical and psychological maladies which hinder self-actualization. Consequently, one can imagine Hata's "vexed identity" as "a membrane stretched over chopped and broken shards—their edges constantly threatening rupture" (Cowart 80). Hata, at least in the novel's beginning, is a walking trauma.⁴

Lee, however, establishes that even a Franklin Hata can rectify past ills through explorations of memory and reconnections with history and family. Lee's novel uses memory to retrieve loss and provide a chance to discover and promote the healing of self. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* outline a similar process. Survivors tell stories or create testimonies that bridge the gaps in historical and personal memory. Through

this telling the survivor bears witness: "The testimony is, therefore, the process by which the narrator (the survivor) reclaims his position as a witness: reconstitutes the internal 'thou,' and thus the possibility of a witness or a listener inside himself" (85). Although he is not the typical survivor, Hata's journey allows him to reclaim his self and provide history to a silent story. *A Gesture Life* shows that a character can move toward a fuller, healthier understanding of identity.

As a complicated diasporic figure, Hata cannot acculturate fully into either the adopted cultures of Japan and America, making him feel out of place in his environment. In both places, race is the limiting factor that impedes social acceptance. For instance, Captain Ono, his superior during World War Two, remarks that he knows Hata's Korean lineage even though Hata masks this identity in his Japanese life (222). While in America, his Japanese nationality gives a false sense of delight, exoticism, and a "town-affirming" mentality (2). Hata's role-playing both in Japan and America at times reflects the fractured and disjointed existence of some transnationals. Therefore, he feels at one point more "curious and unfamiliar to [him]self" (141). He also wonders if his home has made him shut off from others (193). Later, Hata summarizes what his life has become: "I feel I have not really been living anywhere or anytime, not for the future and not in the past and not at all of-the-moment, but rather in the lonely dream of an oblivion, the nothing-to-nothing drift from one pulse beat to the next, which is really the most bloodless marking out, automatic and involuntary" (320-21). Liminal and diasporic, Hata cannot live anywhere at any time; his traumatic and displaced experiences have made him lost to himself. Lee illuminates this reality through three trends or ailments in Hata's psyche: empty social gestures, a prideful estrangement to others, and several attempts to erase his life through suicidal impulses and personal revisions.

Accordingly, all immigrants, especially those here through similar circumstances as Hata, encounter psychological difficulties assimilating in America. Immigrants, as Hata confirms on one level, constantly are viewed, judged, and incorporated by the society at large. Hata explains this tendency, this political/visual exchange from mainstream society upon the immigrant, through talking about his business: “[I]t was the generous attitude of the customers that drew me out and gave me confidence, and that every decent and good thing that has come to me while I have lived here is due to some corollary of that welcoming, which I have never lost sight of” (4-5). Hata’s identity is formed by his customers’ attitude. Subsequently, Lee’s final line here takes on double meaning, for Hata never loses “sight” of them and they never stop their “sight” of him. Hata ponders after this admission whether he has “too keenly sought approval and consensus” (5). He concludes this thought, stating that “the past proves a most unstable mirror, typically too severe and flattering all at once, and never as truth-reflecting as people would like to believe” (5). Lee’s concept of the “unstable mirror” is important because it symbolizes the immigrant identity that is reflected and refracted back to him/her. “Never as truth-reflecting,” this mirror (i.e., a gaze) reifies that slippery identity of those like Hata.

Lee gives an example of this existence when Hata sees another Japanese business man. Hata describes this meeting: “Once, I even met a Japanese gentleman from the San Francisco Bay area, who owned a store that sounded much like mine, and had opened in the very same year” (20). This double makes Hata “think [that] we both brightened on sighting each other” (20). Seeing the other (man), quite figuratively seeing his own reflection here, instantly “brightens” Hata yet leaves him feeling “an unexpected awkwardness” (20). Socially these two Japanese do not fit in with each other: “You would think we would have plenty to discuss, being of like

race and age and occupation, but our conversation was oddly halting and strained. There was a difficult moment, on being introduced to each other when it was unclear whether we would shake hands or bow” (20). These men should be able to talk freely; however, they cannot and cannot even figure out an appropriate greeting—“as it happened, we exchanged only the mildest pleasantries” (20). For Hata, this discomfort returns to the immigrant’s “unstable mirror,” or the inability to belong in America:

I first wondered if he felt he wasn’t Japanese enough for me, or whether I thought myself not American enough for him. But later on, after returning home, I thought perhaps it was that we felt different from everyone by virtue of being together (these two Japanese in a convention crowd), and that it was this fact that made us realize, for a moment, our sudden and unmistakable sense of not fitting in. (20)

Hata and his double as members of an ethnic/immigrant minority seem unable to integrate this double consciousness.

Hata admits after this encounter that his comfortable lifestyle is wearing thin. After noting that “this happy blend of familiarity and homeyness and what must be belonging, is strangely beginning to disturb me,” (20), Hata begins to interrogate his relationships to his place and others. While initially proud of his rootlessness, Hata comes to find that a problem, stating:

There is something exemplary to the sensation of near-perfect lightness, of being in a place and not being there, which seems of course a chronic condition of my life but then, too, its everyday unction, the trouble finding a remedy but not quite a cure, so that the problem naturally proliferates until it has become you through and through. (289-90)

This “problem” that becomes “you through and through” corresponds to life as a transnational survivor, drifting upon the forces that put one “in a place [while] not being there.” Rationalizing this existence, Hata explains that upon his “decision to leave Japan for good,” he did not wish “to think at length about women and intimate relations and companionship, for [he] knew there would be myriad difficulties ahead for [him], in setting up [his] small bit of commerce, and other things in life” (48).⁵ Through retrospection, Hata begins to see that this “chronic condition” needs a “remedy.”

Because he is socially incapable, Hata early in life believes that gestures provide substance in his life. However, as Anne Anlin Cheng notes, “social performance” acts as a “theatrical rather than substantive aspect of subjecthood” (559). For example, after exploring the entrails of a pig, he concludes that the soul resides in the flesh and not in the mind: “I have had the thought from time to time that indeed these [referring to a mutilated pig’s quivering heart and lungs] were the vessels of the animal’s spirit, and that perhaps our souls, too, reside not in our minds but in the very flesh of us, the frank, gray tissue which seems most remarkably possessed of the will to go on, to persist” (247). Preferring to believe that our bodies represent our souls, Hata relies on physical gestures throughout the novel’s first half. Yet these formalities subsume his interpersonal connection to others. Sunny (i.e., his daughter) proclaims that her father, “make[s] a whole life of gestures and politeness” (95). Earlier in his life, Captain Ono says similarly: “You [...] too much depend upon generous fate and gesture” (266). Accordingly, Ono explains to Hata that “[t]here is the germ of infirmity in you, which infects everything you touch or attempt” (266). Hata’s gestures thus stemmed from a self-constructed Japanese identity that subverted a never fully realized Korean self. Striving to be always someone else, he manages only to become a simulacrum of identity—a Mr. Miyagi (i.e., Asian-American

actor Noriyuki “Pat” Morita’s famous stereotype) for suburban New York.⁶ In fact, in his American “home”—town of Bedley Run, “Doc” Hata seems to embrace the stereotype—or as Hamilton Carroll labels, “a profound self-deception” (592)—of the “ideal minority”: the respectable Asian other or wise old sage who fastidiously invests and “grooms” his life (137-8), gives calculating responses (130), prompts advice and wisdom (319), and makes America “orientally” exotic (104).⁷ More simply, Hata realizes that he has a developed “an unexpected condition of transience here, a walking case of others’ certitude” (21). Acting out empty gestures and rationalizing them, either for reputation or for adherence to perceived Japanese-Americanness, creates Hata’s gesture life, one that limits his connection with others.⁸ His unyielding complacency to remain in the periphery prevents himself “to be part (if but a millionth) of the massing, and [... to] pass through with something more than a life of gestures” (299). Standing on the sidelines of life, in other words, speaks to a latent problem on Hata’s part of fitting in. Gestures are thus a means to mask his uncomfortable position in society.

Hata also is a disturbed character, one who at first prides himself on his estranged relationships—a quality that reflects another malady. The slow deterioration in his relationship with Mary Burns offers insight about this tendency. Mary Burns, a widowed, middle-aged neighbor, fosters changes in Hata, however brief. After he recounts their first conversation, he discovers a change emanating from his psyche: “[W]ith Mary Burns I seemed to forget the place where I was. [...] It was an almost memorial sweetness, rising beneath me like a lifting wave, as if it were intent on transporting me, sending me to a place across oceans” (49). Unmoored by her gentle character, Hata does not allow himself to ride this wave to a new place. Instead, he quickly moves away from this liberal “sweetness” to prescribed gestures. Mary Burns fits into his plan for an American life (for the motherless Sunny,

he claims): “My only real chance was to locate a childless widow who might consider an opportunity for motherhood reason enough to leave her homeland” (51). He admits that “it was obvious how nearly perfect Mary would be as a mother” (313). For Hata, however, his logical disposition does not overrule his socially prescribed gestures. One great example of this occurs during a love scene between Mary and Hata. Upon wandering off together on an “impromptu hike,” they begin to kiss “spurring ebullience that caught [them] both off guard” (313). Moving deeper into the nearby woods, they slip (due to Mary’s urging) into “a small opening within a thicket, [...] a lair that must have been used by deer” (314). Hata explains the passion that begins: “And we began to kiss, and eventually our hands were purposefully exploring each other, lingering and caressing and soon enough undoing buttons, clasps. It would have been scandalous in town had someone caught us. But it didn’t seem that we cared” (314). Constantly posturing or concerned about society’s view of him, Hata lets this awareness rest in the scene. However, a deeper hindrance surfaces, for Hata cannot let himself make love to her despite her want, admitting, “I felt awfully young, touching her, and the wanting I had wished never again to know was rushing back to me, a disturbing shiver in my fingers and in my mouth and in my eyes. I stopped everything then” (315). He feels that his passion is “disturbing” and cannot continue. More problematic, they “never [speak] again of what had happened” in this scene (315). The Mary Burns relationship reveals that Hata cannot move beyond his psychological inhibitions or socially determined gestures. He would rather avoid intimacies and confrontations than foster a health relationship at that point in his life.

Similarly, Hata has trouble with Sunny, his adopted daughter, and avoids working through the fissures in their relationship. Lee illustrates this quality early when Hata restores her room after she abandons him:

I remember patching and repainting the ceiling and walls, making sure to fix all the mars in the plaster. There were larger pocks, into which I found it easy enough to spade the filler. But it was the smaller ones, particularly the tack holes, which seemed to number in the hundreds, [sic] that took the greatest part of my time. In the end, I found myself doing the work in half-foot squares, pressing in the paste with the tip of a finger, smoothing it out, and it wasn't until much later, as I'd drift over the surfaces, that the whole project was quite satisfactorily done. (14-15)

Refashioning Sunny's room represents Hata's denial. He avoids the conflict that made her leave in the first place. Feeling "the whole project" to be "quite satisfactorily done," Hata's tone described above drives away the pain behind losing his daughter. By working "in half-foot squares," Hata systematically blots/erases her out of his life. This act reifies an earlier desire he mentions: "I wanted to hide the real depth of the trouble, put it away not (as Sunny always contended) for the sake of my reputation or standing but so I could try to forget she was my daughter, that she had ever come to live with me and had grown up before my eyes" (98).⁹ He wants to erase her from his life.

Most disturbingly, Hata has several suicidal or psychotic impulses that are deep-seated attempts to separate himself from others—the last type of psychological ailment. Hata's suicidal impulses and moments of erasure begin from the novel's opening sequence. He ponders, like John Cheever's protagonist in "The Swimmer," the domestic, suburban repetition of life, and while believing he could be swimming in neighboring pools, Hata swallows some water (22). Later he explains a desire to breathe water: "Some of us longtime swimmers often wish for ourselves that submerged, majestic flight, feel the near-desire to open one's mouth and relax and let the waters rush

in deep, hoping that something magical might happen” (277).¹⁰ Elsewhere Hata faints while visiting Sunny and describes the breathless sensation: “There’s a feeling of something like purity again, a razing and renewal, as if I might wholly banish all that I was just a moment ago” (207). For Hata, ending one’s breathing allows a twisted vision of rebirth. Later, he wonders if he wants simply to kill himself or transmogrify into “a brand-new life, fresh and hopeful and unfettered” (277). These moments show Hata’s latent impulses to end life and to find a “wholly different heart and shell and mien” (277).

It is important to remember that suicide never literally occurs in the book. Still Lee demonstrates other moments of erasure. The novel’s early house cleaning scene appears minor at first look. After all, is not Franklin Hata, our narrator of twenty pages, just burning some old, useless documents to warm his chilled body after his morning swim? On the surface, he is doing just that. However, examining the contents and method of his burning reveals a covert act of erasure. Hata burns “the decades-old files and papers and other expired and useless documents” which includes “such stuff as canceled checks and mortgage and bank statements” (24). Although these items appear to be insignificant and the act itself normal and necessary, the narrator is erasing records of his existence, proof of his (American) residency. Similarly, this scene corresponds to the earlier one about Sunny’s room. In both cases, Hata tries to get rid of evidence of life—perhaps he is exorcising a death wish.

Earlier in life while invading with the Japanese army, Hata similarly denies or erases his Korean heritage and identity, which Carroll deems a “repudiation of his own heritage” (603). When the Korean comfort woman Kkutaeh explicitly states, ““You are a Korean,”” he replies, ““No [...] I am not’” (234). Erasing his original background, he assumes a Japanese identity, stating proudly: ““I’m a medical officer of the Imperial Forces, and there’s nothing else to be said. [...] I spoke some

Korean as a boy. But then no more” (235).¹¹ He also denies his Korean name (235). On a practical level, this denial represents Hata's survival under the Japanese hegemonic regime. (After all, his birth parents inculcate an idea of Japanese superiority (235). To succeed in Japan, he has to deny his Korean identity.) On a psychological level, however, Hata's dismissal of the Korean language represents a struggle to come to terms with his place in Japanese society. Because of his slippery existence as a Japanese soldier and his even messier understanding of his Korean humanity, Hata cannot give in to himself and help Kkutaeh escape forced prostitution.¹² Even when he is negotiating and trying to take a stand for her, he suddenly and unconsciously salutes Kkutaeh's tormentor, Captain Ono (264).

Hata holds long-lasting guilt over Kkutaeh's death and his culpability in it. To assuage this overwhelming pain, he adopts Sunny. Mark Jerng in his “Recognizing the Transracial Adoptee: Adoption Life Stories and Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*” elaborates on the issue of adoption in the novel, noting that because of “confusions of temporality and the ambivalence of address” “adoption is figured in terms of transference” (45).¹³ Jerng continues and finds transference in the “ambivalent ethical relation between Doc Hata and K to the adoptive relation between Hata and Sunny” (53). Indeed, Hata explains to his adoption agent “how [he] always hoped for a daughter, the words suddenly streaming from [his] mouth as though [he had] long practiced the speech. [He] found [him]self speaking of a completeness, the unitary bond of a daughter and father. Of harmony and balance” (74). An almost unconscious admission, his explanation speaks to his desire to (re)create a love with a “girl” (i.e., Kkutaeh). Mary Burns notices this “transference,” to borrow Jerng's term: “[I]t's as if she's a woman to whom you're beholden, which I can't understand. [...] You adopted her. But you act almost guilty, as if she's someone you hurt once, or betrayed, and now you're

obliged to do whatever she wishes, which is never good for anyone, much less a child” (60). Prophetic and accurate, this quote reinforces Hata’s psychological replacement of Kkutaeh with Sunny.

Consequently, Hata’s role in Sunny’s abortion, the last major act of erasure, illustrates an extremely unhealthy attempt to reorder his past. Lee parallels Kkutaeh’s mutilation and Sunny’s partial-birth abortion to indicate further Hata’s psychological conflation of the two characters. Jerng explains, “The double-movement of the narrative, oscillating as it does between looking forwards and looking backwards, acts out this model of transference in narrating the adoptive relation” (55). For example, Hata expects Sunny to come from a “hardworking, if squarely humble, Korean family” (204) similar to Kkutaeh’s (248). Even though there is evidence that Sunny is not Kkutaeh, Hata cannot move beyond Sunny’s impure miscegenation, or her “blight.” According to him, Sunny’s “hair, her skin, were there to see, self-evident, and it was obvious how some other color (or colors) ran deep within her” (204). He also wants Sunny and himself to have a “natural affinity” (204) much as he thought he had with Kkutaeh, “a special correspondence between us, an affinity of being” (263). Of course, Hata and Sunny have no such relationship. Even in parenting, Hata works against the image Kkutaeh presented of her father, who was indifferent, cold, and untouching (245). As a result, Hata tries to be the perfect father: “overgenerous, [...] extremely permissive and obliging,” and hands-on (71). Again, Sunny is not Kkutaeh. Sullen and rebellious, Sunny turns out to despise his lessons and overbearing style.¹⁴

Hata’s largest attempt at psychological reconciliation with Kkutaeh is Sunny’s abortion. He needs to erase his young mistake. Earlier in his life, Kkutaeh wanted Hata to kill her and end her misery as a “comfort woman” (301). Hata failed to do this, and she was gang-raped and dismembered. Hata (dis)remembers finding her:

I could not feel my hands as they gathered, nor could I feel the weight of such remains. And I could not sense that other, tiny, elfin form I eventually discovered, miraculously whole, I could not see the figured legs and feet, the utter, blessed digitation of the hands. Nor could I see the face, the perfected cheek and brow. Its pristine sleep still unbroken, undisturbed. And I could not know what I was doing, or remember any part. (305)

Retracing his discovery through negation, denial, and avoidance, Hata cannot accept that his inaction causes Kkutaeh's most horrible reality: her fetus is taken from her.¹⁵ In the more recent past, Sunny's abortion (forced upon her by Hata) stands for another adoptive act of compensation for Kkutaeh and a covert attempt to erase guilt for Hata. The clinician Dr. Anastasia has tremendous reservations about performing Sunny's abortion (for she is well over twenty-eight weeks).¹⁶ Hata insists that the abortion happen, claiming that she has failed to finish high school, that she has no job, and that the father is a (black) drug addict (342). Beyond this insistence, Hata also assists the doctor (343). He does this in hopes that the "similar things" he saw earlier in life can be put right (344). Sunny's abortion, however, merely repeats the violence done to Kkutaeh.

Such a horrible moment would certainly leave the reader despising Hata. Yet Lee begins a redeeming process through physical and psychological recuperation. Hata's lung condition from the opening sequence proves ironically healthy. Presently Hata offers a self-diagnosis: "From what I know and feel, I'm almost certain that I'm pleuritic, as my lungs don't seem to be improving the way they should. My chest feels leaden and straightjacketed and generally out of sorts. [...] And then there is the other, unrelated complication that has arisen, one far worse in my mind (and spirit-sapping), which is that I suddenly have an onset of the shingles" (67). Lee's

language of psychological/physical imprisonment (i.e., “straightjacketed,” “out of sorts,” and “spirit-sapping”) indicates a transition Hata has into introspection. The smoke inhalation and its lung irritation closes Hata’s active physical life; reflection and analysis replace fitness and action. One small example demonstrates Hata’s change. Hata contemplates the theme from Cheever’s “The Swimmer” and begins to identify himself with that character: “I suddenly have the thought that I’m not swimming in my own pool at all, but am someplace else, in a neighboring pool or pond” (22). Even though this reference has been explained earlier in this essay, Hata provides an exegesis of the story offering three interpretations: the swimmer engages in a quest only to find spiritual disillusionment, he is mad or drunk and swims to escape from the “realities of his fallen station,” or he metaphorically passes the ““seasons”” of his life through swimming (23). This literary guesswork opens a new way to see Hata’s life. Hata’s character moves from activity, or gesture, to reflection. In a way his lung condition affords time to contemplate his psyche. Unlike Cheever’s protagonist, Hata is able to stop at the roadside and return home before it is too late.

Hata begins his own spiritual quest to promote a healthier, recuperated self. After landing in the hospital, Hata starts a recovery in mind and body. Through the return of repressed memories, Hata becomes a new character, one who fully understands himself and becomes healed. Theorist Cassie Premo Steele, in her book *We Heal from Memory*, reminds us that “[i]t is memory, as both a problem and a promise, that forms and allows us to form our individual and collective identities” (2).¹⁷ In essence, by casting his mind into his darkened past, Hata tells both an individual story and that of collective transnationals. Specifically, contemplating his relationship with Kkutaeh allows Hata to come to terms with his Korean heritage. Reconnecting with Sunny begins to resolve his guilt. Selling his house impels Hata into

a new life. By the novel's ending, a whole set of new, substantive "gestures" usher in a new character.

For Hata, Kkutaeh and her memory link him to a silenced Korean identity. His description of Kkutaeh even suggests an infantile fascination: "After some time I turned to see that she had finally fallen asleep, her knees drawn up toward her chest. I stared at her for quite a long moment, taking in her figure and loosely fisted hands and the serene, pale oval of her face, when she slowly opened her eyes" (240). Kkutaeh's body becomes a substitute for the Korean motherland. Although he denied his knowledge of Korean earlier, he admits, before gazing at her, that Korean was his "childhood language" (239). The Lacanian gaze reinforces his out-of-placeness around her, as Lee extends. Hata's gazing upon Kkutaeh, or his *la objet petit a*, awakens a desire within him: he feels "a certain connection to her, not in blood or culture or kind, but in that manner, I suppose, that any young man might naturally feel for a young woman" (239).¹⁸ This "connection" with her transforms into possession, an unviolent sexual assault:

I crawled around and lay down behind her, so that our bodies were aligned, nestled like spoons. She was warm and still and I gently pressed my face into the back of her neck and breathed in the oily musk of her hair. And it was so that I finally began to touch her. I put my hand on the point of her hip and could feel all at once the pliancy of it and the meagerness and the newness, too. I felt bewildered and innocent and strangely renewed, as though a surge of some great living being were coursing up my arms and spreading through my unknowing body. [She remains still, faking sleep]. I kissed as much of her body as was bared. I kissed her small breasts, which seemed to spill a sweet, watery liquid. I gagged but did not care. [...] And when I was done I felt the enveloping warmth of a fever, its languorous

cocoon, though when I gazed at her shoulder and back there was nothing but stillness, her posture unchanged, her skin cool and colorless, and she lay as if she were the sculpture of a recumbent girl and not a real girl at all. (259-60)

This passage reveals many ideas about the protagonist. First, he is sexually naïve: he takes advantage of her, fails to recognize the obvious indication of her pregnancy, and associates this assault with love (saying “I love you” both in Japanese and Korean afterward). While he may feel “renewed” by his stealthy intercourse, she reciprocates nothing “as if she is a sculpture.” Secondly, Hata misunderstands the tenderness. The “enveloping warmth of a fever” he feels, this slow-opening “cocoon”—a word that suggests a locked-up kernel of rebirth to him—corresponds to orgasm, not love. And though he notices her tears following the assault (261), he cannot console her then.

Years later, Hata revises his intentions. Slipping into third person, the protagonist finds a new chrysalis to open, stating, “He did not yet know it, but he hoped that if he could simply be near to her, near to her voice [or her language] and to her body—if never even touching her—near, he thought, to her sleeping mind, he might somehow be found” (240). A need to protect or preserve her, found through introspection and time, proffers the chance to “be found.” Perhaps Hata wishes he could have been “outed” for his ethnicity and perish with her.

Hata is given an opportunity to mourn Kkutaeh and to reconnect with his Korean heritage through a metaphoric sequence of considerable importance. Lee provides an ethereal backdrop for Hata’s grief: “Now and then, I sometimes forget who I really am. [...] I lose all sense of myself. I forget what it is I do, the regular activity of my walk and my swim and my taking of tea, the minor trappings and doings of my days, what I’ve made up to be the token flags of my life. I forget why it is I do such

things, why they give me interest or solace or pleasure” (285). Hata begins to analyze his gestures, or “the token flags of [his] life.” He continues and describes a journey: “Then I might get up in the middle of the night and dress and walk all the way to town, to try to figure once again the notices, the character, the sorts of actions of a man like me, what things or set of things define him in the most simple and ordinary way” (285). In this fugue state, he finds himself defenseless, open to long-lost memories. Indeed, he admits following one excursion to town that “K has finally come back for [him]” and that at “moment [...] [he] feel[s] at home” (286). Lee ambiguously labels this apparition “K” to represent both Kkutaeh and Korea.¹⁹ Lee chooses to use “for” to suggest that this “K” will be provoking him homeward to her, to his past, to Korea. Hata remains surprisingly passive until he spurns a conversation with the “K” ghost: she asks, ““Will we be going away soon, Lieutenant?””. He responds with ““Where would we be going to, K?””. ““I had hoped we would finally travel to all the places we have spoken of. To Shanghai, and Kyoto, and perhaps even Seoul. Or some other place,”” she answers (287). Hata’s fantasy indicates his desire to revise history, to reenact a wish fulfillment from his past.²⁰ Shanghai, Kyoto, and Seoul, the cultural centers of their Asian identities, are the places these characters could journey “to try to figure once again the notices, the character, the sorts of actions of a man like [him], what things or set of things define him in the most simple and ordinary way” (285). Lee reminds the reader that Hata cannot find solace for his pain here; after Hata and “K” end the conversation, she joins him in bed only to vanish.²¹ In an attempt to promote a lasting relationship with his past, Hata makes a gesture that promises change: he sells his house.

An object of pride, the house emblemizes Hata’s American life. Aside from its function in his multiple erasures, the house becomes a vestige of stagnant life, “the penultimate trap of living,” according to Hata (287).

Indeed, the house maintained through Hata's constant grooming and gestures reifies an unlived-in or (un) comfortable existence in America. He even finds later in life that his house is "a lovely, standing forgery, pristine enough and old enough that it passes most every muster" (352). Lee further encourages Hata's recognition of this "forgery" after he returns from the hospital. Feeling displaced and estranged, Hata begins to see the house with its "showcase, immaculate, pristine and classic condition, appearing just as though I have not lived there every day for the last thirty years of my life" (119). Acknowledging this peculiar feeling of displacement shows Hata's growth through his medical/psychological recuperation. He learns that the house stands for an inner disconnection, a sign that there is something missing in his life. Lee hints at this point early. Hata explains an alienation, "I keep stepping outside my house, walking its grounds, peering at the highly angled shape of its roofs, the warm color and time-textured facade, looking at it as though I were doing it for the very first time, when I wondered if I would ever in my life call such a house my home" (22). Interrogating the idea of this house as a home, Lee anticipates the novel's ambiguous last line— "almost home"—here (356). Hata's house, as it is constituted and maintained, is not a home but "a lovely, standing forgery" (352). Therefore, selling the house allows him to move on in life, to end his American malaise, and to pay off several symbolic, psychological debts.

Whereas Hata's selling of the house represents a moving forward, the repairs he forges in the relationships with Sunny and his grandson, Thomas, signify a moving backward, a final healing of his past. As we have seen, Hata and Sunny's relationship was dysfunctional from the start—based largely on Hata's ill-formed attempt to replace Kkutaeh. The late amelioration of this relationship plays an integral part in Hata's psychological recuperation. Thomas works as the catalyst that initiates the healing process. When Sunny states that Thomas has saved her "over and

over, a thousand times,” Hata affirms and realizes “a bloom of well-being is opening immediately and fully in [his] heart, the kind of pleasure [he has] hitherto only read about or imagined, what must be the secret opiate of all fathers and mothers” (283). As grandfather, Hata truly understands the benefits of fatherhood. Promises of rebirth seem to shine upon Hata, for he has a “hope of a familial continuation, an unpredictable, richly evolving *to be*” (334). Aside from Lee’s use of the infinitive here, which suggests an unending existence, the author has Sunny carry a white paper bag. A figurative white flag of truce, this bag redirects the novel’s motif of black flags, “banner[s] [that warn] of a contagion within.” Instead of warning of impending doom and “spreading death,” this marker signals a new beginning in Hata’s relationship with his daughter (224).

Hata has encountered his repressed memories and has tackled the overwhelming guilt he has had in his life. Lee, however, provides a concrete example to show Hata’s change. Again, I return to the house. Selling his house becomes a secret philanthropic gesture: he gives money for the Hickeys’ bankrupt business and their ailing son Patrick. Unlike earlier gestures in the novel, this gesture connects Hata to his community in a new way, not as flourishes of self-aggrandizing and conformity. Perhaps Cheng explains this point best: “We might call this final litany a choice for *active passivity* in the most earnest sense: not the passive aggression that motivated much of Hata’s actions in the past [...] but instead an *active refusal to act any further* in bad faith” (571). Moreover, the remainder of the profits will allow Hata to travel and address other ills. He ends the narrative with more promises: “Perhaps I’ll travel to where Sunny wouldn’t go, to the south and west and maybe farther still, across the oceans, to land on former shores” (355-6). Like his fantastic encounter with “K,” Hata ponders the possibility to return to Asia. Yet, he will not be fooled this time by false dreams. He says, “I won’t seek out my destiny or

fate” or “find comfort in the visage of a creator or the forgiving dead” (356). By this point, he realizes revisions and repressions will not change his past; a more simplistic life awaits him. The novel’s last paragraph illustrates these points: “Let me simply bear my flesh, and blood, and bones. I will fly a flag. Tomorrow, when this house is alive and full, I will be outside looking in. I will be already on a walk someplace, in this town or the next or one five thousand miles away. I will circle round and arrive again. Come almost home” (356). This passage reverses many of the themes of transnational and psychological alienation and ailments throughout the narrative. Fulfilling his idea that the “soul resides in the flesh” (247), Hata now will own the corporeal properties of his life, leading to a spiritual health. Furthermore, he surely will fly a white flag to let the world know that there is no longer disease and destruction within him. Finally, he will journey, no doubt traveling the five thousand miles to Shanghai, Kyoto, and Seoul to fulfill Kkutaeh’s desire, and arrive again. Significantly, Hata moves on from his house, which he detaches from his gaze. To “come almost home,” means Hata has found peace and place. This journey will reveal that he is not as lost as he once was.²²

In some ways, *A Gesture Life* chronicles the awakening of a damaged man. Sparked by accident, Hata’s recuperation opens a vast reservoir of loss and trauma in their various forms. Hata “arrives” by the narrative’s end to have improved relationships with his daughter and grandson. He has worked through his role in the Kkutaeh fiasco. He has sold his house to provide opportunities for the future. We learn that transnational souls like Hata’s can be recuperated to become new and healthier.

Notes

- 1 David Cowart explains, “Not comfortably Korean, Japanese, American, or Chinese, Franklin Hata is a casualty of the twentieth century[–]he can never [...] escape the ugliness he has witnessed” (80).

- 2 On the other hand, Young-Oak Lee notes that Hata “[b]ecomes an American citizen” (147).
- 3 In another interview, Adrienne Mong notes that “Lee admits he feels the same way as his characters, out of place.”
- 4 For an extended discussion of trauma, see Hamilton Carroll’s “Traumatic Patriarchy: Reading Gendered Nationalisms in Chang-Rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life*.” Carroll makes this claim: “In *A Gesture Life*, trauma functions as an alternative form of memory and history. Understood as a disruption of nationally oriented referential history, the traumatic narrative orchestrates the production of a historiography that exposes the workings of gender and race that cut between and across the novel’s doubled national locations” (595).
- 5 Hata even suggests that perhaps sub-urban America generally fosters this disconnection: “[A]s it mostly is in towns like Bedley Run, and particularly on streets like ours, being neighbors means sharing the most limited kinds of intimacies, such as sewer lines and property boundaries and annual property tax valuations. Anything that falls into a more personal realm is only tentatively welcomed” (44).
- 6 After all, his literary antecedent, Jay Gatsby, enacts a similar project to disguise his middle-western, working class roots.
- 7 This example references the odd encounter between Hata, searching for Sunny at a teenage party, and a girl behind a veiled bed. During intercourse, the girl fixates on Hata as she reaches climax to his image. The “exotic” I refer to here is largely based on Sheng-Mei Ma’s *The Deathly Embrace* and Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*. Both texts show how race (i.e., Otherness) sexually attracts the majority.
- 8 Cheng agrees here, stating: “The novel features a protagonist named Franklin Hata, who has spent his entire life donning various forms of camouflage and whose life is structured by the struggle between guilt and desire, between self-erasure and self-assertion” (558).
- 9 Later, he even describes her as his “former daughter” (132).
- 10 In another moment of literary homage, Lee borrows language from Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*. Specifically, Edna Pontellier’s watery suicide reads, “The foamy wavelets curled up to her white feet, and coiled like serpents about her ankles. She walked out. The water was chill, but she walked on. The water was deep, but she lifted her white body and reached out with a long, sweeping stroke. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace. [. . .] She looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, then sank again” (109).
- 11 Although he says this under public discourse as the medical officer, he privately speaks to her “in her own language” of Korean when she is checked into the camp (232).
- 12 Cheng elaborates this idea, “Fulfilling K.’s request would have meant breaking rank, transgressing not only military code but also his Japanese and masculine identifications” (562).

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- 13 Jenrg anticipates my argument stating: “Two narrative drives co-exist uneasily within the text: Doc Hata’s drive to belong and find closure for his life as an assimilated Japanese American in the suburban town of Bedley Run; and his constant returns to and flashbacks of the past, the traumatic events of his participation as a Japanese soldier in World War II. What connects these two narrative movements in Doc Hata’s adoption of a Korean girl, Sunny” (51-2).
- 14 This behavior results from Hata’s “*continuation* of a series of lifelong psychic struggles over social, ethnic, and sexual identifications” (Cheng 564).
- 15 Consult Cheng for another explanation, regarding the interpretation of Kkutaeh’s body (563).
- 16 This peculiar name perhaps comes back to Jerng’s idea of temporal confusion. Maybe Hata wants to filter this scene as both a fantasy and as anesthesia.
- 17 Steele argues that poetry allows victims and others to begin the process of healing.
- 18 See Cheng for an explanation of Lacan’s Gaze (566-570).
- 19 Carroll also makes this point, “Symbolically [...] the ‘K’ of Kkutaeh is the ‘K’ of Korea” (604).
- 20 Hata also superimposes northeastern Asia into this setting. For instance, he begins to smell the scent of “the sea, a warm and gentle southern sea” (288), and he sees his yard become a “broad continent” and his pool “a whole ocean” (289).
- 21 Lee gives another glimpse of this theory during the conversation when Hata objects to “K’s insistence on being with him in “some other place.” He asks, ““But I have to wonder, why being here is so abhorrent to everyone but me? We have everything that we require. And much more. We have an impressive house and property in the best town in the area, where we are happily known and respected. We have ample time and quiet and means. I have tried as hard as I can to provide these things, and we have been welcomed as warmly as anyone can expect. Everything is in delicate harmony”” (287). She answers that ““nothing is wrong with it”” but that she ““cannot die here”” (287). She seems to know the importance of her cultural heritage more than he does at this point.
- 22 David Cowart suggests that Hata’s use of “home” works as a “kind of absconding signified” in the last line (80). Cowart also suggests that America can be Hata’s “almost home” (80), but I believe the where is not important for Hata’s journey. What is more important is that Hata’s elusive home does exist.

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Pachucos, Chicano Homeboys and Gypsy *Caló*: Transmission of a Speech Style

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The term *caló* is well-known within many Mexican American communities as a bilingual slang that is one of several speech styles in the community repertoire, closely associated with Pachuco groups of the U.S. Southwest that came to prominence in the 1940's. But the term *caló* predates its introduction to the U.S. by many decades. With roots in a Romany-based *germania* of the 16th century, from the speech of immigrant gypsies evolved a new Spanish-based argot, the result of language shift from Romany to Spanish over centuries. By the 19th century, *caló* referred to a Spanish-based criminal argot called "*caló jergal*" by a contemporaneous Spanish researcher (Salillas 1896), a mixed code of gypsy Romany and Peninsular Spanish which was used by members of that group as an in-group, secret speech style.

This type of secret code, retaining some of the gypsies' Sanskrit-origin words and characteristic wordplay, may still be found in use among some of the Spanish-speaking

criminal populations in Spain and in the Americas. Moreover, gypsies are still an identifiable ethnic presence in Spain, and some features of gypsy *caló* are found in the vernacular Spanish slang of some cities like Madrid (Oliver 1987) and Malaga (Cipas 1973). That elements of gypsy *caló* are still found in the dialects of Spain is not surprising; what is, however, is its relationship to the in-group argot of the Mexican American Pachucos of the early decades of the 20th century in the United States. From available historical evidence, the Pachucos appear to have spoken in the same creative, neologistic style as did the Spanish gypsies, where elements of Pachuco *caló* were subsequently incorporated into the slang of the Spanish-speaking communities of which they were a part, similar to what happened in some parts of Spain. Moreover, words of gypsy origin are still found in the speech of modern day Chicano youths, some of them the ‘homeboy’ lingo used by street gangs, despite the fact that many members of this younger generation do not speak Spanish. What explains the transmission of a long-ago gypsy speech style to new groups on a new continent? What elements of this style were appropriated by the community at large and why?

Questions regarding the interrelationship between and among ethnic minorities are rarely addressed in ethnic studies research. When linguistic evidence of connectedness surfaces, the question that emerges is whether marginalized groups transmit their covert cultural and linguistic practices not only across ethnic groups but across time as well. While the influence of Romany *germanía*, an in-group criminal argot, on other criminal jargons in Europe and in Latin America is generally assumed to have gone hand-in-hand with the incursions of the nomadic Rom, i.e., the Romany people—self-labeled as “gypsies”—into these areas, assumptions about the transmission of this way of speaking have, to my knowledge, never been questioned nor fully explored. In order to provide a satisfactory explanation

for the similarity of the argots across time and space we must make explicit links between the intra- and inter-group lifestyles of the groups, their social and economic marginality, and their linguistic practices. The primary purpose of the current study is to examine two issues: one, the transmission of a speech style from the Old World to the New, given that what is transmitted is an “insider” style of speech, a social dialect rather than a regional one; and two, the *iconization* of the *caló* speech style as a marker of a bilingual Chicano or Mexican American identity by members of the community at large, first in the era of the Pachucos and persisting to the present day.

Communities of practice

The conceptual background of this research is that articulated by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992; 1995) in investigating language and gender. Their sociolinguistic-anthropological approach is based on the notion of “communities of practice,” groups through which individuals move and “belong to” based on a constellation of beliefs and behaviors, not the least of which is language. In their words, “Language is a primary tool people use in constituting themselves and others as “kinds” of people in terms of which attributes, activities, and participation in social practice can be regulated... how people talk expresses their affiliations with some and their distancing from others, their embrace of certain social practices and their rejection of others—their claim to membership (and to particular forms of membership) in certain communities of practice and not others” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1995, 470).

Mobility has also been discussed as a potentially important but little-studied correlate of linguistic behavior; although it has been recognized only indirectly in discussions of social class (see discussion in Chambers 1995, 57). It is of interest to note that the particular types of communities of practice under discussion are of limited social mobility, or at least their members have

perceived themselves as such. It is the perception of lack of mobility, perhaps, rather than the actual potential that motivates behaviors antithetical to the typical working, middle, and other classes who conform to mainstream ideologies. The groups under discussion here are arguably both ethnically and economically marginalized, and their own actions in response to this state of affairs may have contributed and continue to contribute to their social marginalization. Clearly, class could be considered a relevant social variable in characterizing them, but it is perhaps the perceived lack of social mobility that leads to the lifestyles shared by these communities of practice.

Marginalized communities

The particular communities of practice whose language is of interest are the following: a) the criminal element in the Spain of the late 19th century, whose *caló jergal* “gypsy slang” is documented to have originated in gypsy cant (Salillas 1986); b) youth groups in Mexico that have similar lifestyle and speech characteristics (Alarcón 1978); c) the Pachuco groups of the 1930’s and 40’s in the US, in which Mexican American youths expressed their bilingual/bicultural identity (Barker 1975; Webb 1976, 1982) ; and d) contemporary Chicano youths, particularly those in Los Angeles and in South Texas, identified by researchers as belonging to gangs (Vigil 1988; Moore 1978; Valdez, et. al. 1999). Each successive group appears to be the descendant of the previous one socially, linguistically, and historically. What the latter three groups have in common are their youth and emerging adult identity, their defiance of authority, their marginalization in the society, and their Spanish-background cultural heritage and language. The following discussion of the lifestyles of all four groups does not seek to perpetuate stereotypes, but merely reports what other scholars have said to be typical of them.

The origin of *caló* in the gypsy culture of Spain was the Romany contact dialect with Spanish known as *germania*,

a synonym for *hermandad* or “brotherhood.” Immigrating to Spain and the rest of Europe in the 15th century, the Romany people used a special language that originated in their lifestyle, which was often defiant of the laws established by the middle- and upper-classes of the time. Dark-haired and dark-skinned, the group was different in appearance and mode of dress from the societies they came into contact with at the time of their diaspora. They were itinerants for a long time, living on the margin by any means they could, but by the late 19th century they had become a stable population in Andalusia, particularly Seville (Stewart 1992, 24). The tradition of not intermarrying outside of their ethnic group, their beliefs in the supernatural, the strong division of gender roles in the culture, their allegiance to their own judicial code and their widespread reputation as thieves and liars—well-founded or not—have kept them on the margins of Spanish society (Stewart 1992; Chaliand and Ragean 1995).

Whether similar lifestyles in the New World existed at the time cannot be known with certainty. However, the linguistic similarities of the *caló* of Andalusia and that of the New World strongly suggest direct contact with the gypsies of Spain. It is possible that the argot was transmitted to pre-existing groups in America that were already socially marginalized, had limited means of support, and had an ethical code that defied the laws of conventional society. If we accept the idea of pre-existing, parallel communities of practice, it is not difficult to explain the transmission of *caló* to other groups in the Americas.

The temporal-spatial link

The historical connection between the Old World gypsies and the New World youth gangs may have been gypsy bullfighters who interfaced with the drug scene of Mexico City (Vigil 1988: 6; Barker 1975:191), likely in the early 20th century. The *caló* speech style may have

been extremely functional for both groups for the same reasons, namely to hide questionable activities. Such contact with marginalized groups in Mexico City would account for the existence of a variety of *caló* spoken by some youth groups who follow similar lifestyles in that city to the present day. In the late 20th century Alarcón (1978) investigated the speech of adolescents and older *jóvenes* or 'youth' in the Mexican capital, recognizing its origins in the speech of criminals.

Dentro de los subgrupos sociales en los que podemos encontrar el empleo de jergas específicas, se encuentra el de los delincuentes cuyo conjunto de elementos léxicos y sintácticos ha sido conocido como germanía (del latín *germanus*, hermano), y, actualmente como caló o argot. Es un lenguaje de convención imaginado por los ladrones, pícaros y vagabundos de una sociedad, y es un fenómeno que se presenta fundamentalmente en las ciudades... (1978, 48)

[Within the social subgroups in which we can find the employment of specific slang varieties, we find that of delinquents whose set of lexical and syntactic elements has been known as germanía (from Latin *germanus*, 'brother') and is now called caló or argot. It's a language of convention created by the thieves, scoundrels and tramps of a society, and it is a phenomenon that presents itself fundamentally in cities.]

Alarcón also reports that this type of argot was as likely to be spoken by *jóvenes* of the upper social classes masquerading as the working classes because of its authenticating, i.e. reverse snob, appeal (Alarcón 1978, 100-103). Assuming Mexico City to be the primary locus of contact in North America, it is not difficult to believe that the adoption of the *caló* speech style by certain

Mexican American youths in El Paso occurred as the result of interaction with a similar community of practice, i.e., the drug subculture. The fact that it is reported to have been used also by the young men of the community during World War I (Coltharp 1965, 30) as an “inoffensive” jargon hints at the covert prestige that it must have held for those outside of the initial in-group, as it seems to have done for youths in Mexico City.

Barker (1975, 190-193) is the most informative source for the trajectory of *caló* to the West Coast. Barker indicates that *caló* was used by the “the Mexican underworld” prior to being adopted in the 1930’s by the members of El Paso’s “7-X gang, a group of marijuana smokers and peddlers...” (Barker1975:191). He reports that from El Paso it was carried by Mexican American youths who rode the railcars along the route West to Tucson, where some stopped to work in a local bakery. This was independently corroborated by a native of Tucson, Lalo Guerrero (personal interview, July 2000) whose contact with them at the bakery gave him a linguistic basis for a few of his songs and was also one of Barker’s original consultants. From Tucson it spread to Los Angeles in the late 1930’s and early 1940’s by the young men who continued West on the railcars. Largely from El Paso, wordplay on the city’s name caused them to be known as Pachucos (García 2005).

The presence of these young men was felt in Los Angeles not long after their arrival. Pachuco youths were said to be the force behind the creation of 40 to 50 juvenile gangs in Los Angeles in the 1940’s (Pagan 1996, 8). The Pachucos were characterized as having a distinct manner of dress, hairstyle, tattoo markings, and “arcane language,” which associated them with merchants dealing in vice (Pagan 1996, 9). In the opinion of some authorities of the time, they formed a network dealing in drugs, theft, and prostitution (Pagan 1996, 9). It should be noted, however, that most Mexican American adolescents and teenagers of the period in Los Angeles and elsewhere did

not share this Pachuco lifestyle, although the Pachuco in the abstract became an important cultural and linguistic influence on them. Many young men imitated their style of exaggerated dress for social occasions (McWilliams 1968, 242) embodied in the ‘zoot suit’—a loose-fitting frock coat, draped pants pleated at the waist and tapered at the hem, often accessorized with a draped watch chain tucked into a vest and a ‘tando,” a flat, narrow-brimmed hat. This manner of dress was not unlike that worn by well-known African American jazz musicians of the time, who were also innovative creators of contemporary slang. The linguistic influence of the Pachuco on the Mexican American teens of the period may account for its currency in the linguistic repertoire of the present-day community and will be discussed further below.

Socio-psychological characteristics

Barker’s fieldwork in Tucson in the 1940’s revealed that Pachucos did not feel themselves to be part of American society due to their bilingualism and Mexican heritage. Instead, what was expressed was a desire to look for acceptance by one’s own friends (or *carnales*) as co-conspirators outside the mainstream “... to get what they want from society without having to suffer its penalties.” Not deterred by conventional morals, petty theft was acceptable as long as they were not caught. The company of girls was to be enjoyed, but with no strings attached (Barker 1975, 200).

From interviews with older men who were speakers of Pachuco *caló* as youths, Webb (1982) corroborates their sense of *anomie* or “namelessness” which came from a lack of identification with their heritage language and culture, Spanish, or with their adopted language and culture, English (Webb 1982, 121). Usually second generation and bilingual in English and Spanish, they had typically been unsuccessful in the English-speaking mainstream and rejected mainstream values. Their shared social, linguistic, cultural and psychological bonds

were the basis for a peer-group identity, clearly reflected in and expressed by their bilingual argot that combined English and Spanish. It was also called *caló* after its gypsy origins (see Webb 1975, 124-6 for discussion).

The lifestyle of these groups of young men has apparently not changed significantly over the years. Writing about the general characteristics of Mexican American gangs from the 1940's through the 1970's, Moore observes:

[T]he youth gang is a specialized structure of the barrio, and like any other specialized structure (such as the neighborhood church), it develops a specialized subculture, a set of values, norms, and specialized traditions, and sources of status honor... the adolescent gang is a semisecret organization of adolescents and... in later life may be involved in illegal economic activities." (Moore 1978, 36)

Contemporary researchers also recognize the link between the traditional Pachuco and the newer Mexican American gangs in that they have a distinctive style of dress, i.e. baggy pants, flannel shirts, white muscle shirts, head bandanas (for males), and tattoos (Galindo 1999, 178). Nowadays, those embodying formerly Pachuco styles are referred to as *cholos* or *cholas* in some Spanish-speaking communities, or, in areas where the language shift is all but complete, they may be called "chukes" or even "homeboys" and "homegirls," as they are in African American communities.

To summarize, these communities of practice all appear to be closed societies with self-perceptions of limited social mobility, who have distinctive ways of dress and behavior with their own value system and honor code. Furthermore, they are associated with criminal behavior not accepted by conventional society. The use of a distinctive linguistic style, whether it is called *caló*, pachuco talk, or simply slang between other in-

group members, is one of the distinctive behaviors that constitute group membership.

Speech style and identity

Researchers of both *caló* and pachuco indicate that the principal reason for their creation and continued use was to hide criminal activity from out-group members, such as police or law-abiding citizens. True *caló* is used as a secret code to hide illegal activities, a function which goes back to its earliest manifestations. According to Barrow, the “robber language” of the 19th century criminal groups in Europe was used by thieves to “...discuss their schemes and plans of plunder, without being [*sic*] in general understood by those to whom they are obnoxious” (1843:336).

In a similar vein, Alarcón says of twentieth century Mexico City *caló carcelario*, i.e., the argot of jail inmates:

Estas lenguas gregales [jergales?] tienen su principio básico en disfrazar los significados directos, para el no entendimiento de las demás personas . . . (Alarcón 1978:100) [These slangy tongues have their basic origin in disguising direct meanings so that other people don't understand [them]...

Barker, studying the use of *caló* in Tucson in the 1940's, identified it as a Pachuco argot, “a cant or class jargon,” which, because it was bilingual, was “a hybrid arising from a mixture of languages” (1975, 183). He characterized its speakers as being “...adolescents and young men of Mexican descent” of the working class, situated in west Tucson during that period (1975, 185). While not all speakers of Pachuco were gang members in his estimation, those who were differed from those who were not because “...gang participants speak [P]achuco habitually, as a means of communication, and ...gang members have a larger and more up-to-date vocabulary than nonparticipants” (1975, 199).

Modern-day Chicano gang members maintain the function of *caló* as a secret code or speech style. According to Vigil's study of Los Angeles gang life (1988, 119), youths shifted their manner of speaking when law enforcement and criminal justice authorities appeared, as if to protect each other from the "... intrusions of untrustworthy strangers" (Vigil 1998, 119). However, in modern-day Los Angeles, language shift has meant limitations in their use of Spanish.

Today barrio gang talk is mostly English, and the degree of Spanish and *cholo* terms that are spoken is dependent on the tradition and generational history of the barrio; in a fashion, it is one way to show loyalty and allegiance to remnants of Mexican culture, or, more basically, "us" against "them". (Vigil 1988,119)

Of course, *caló* does not function merely to hide in-group communication from outsiders, but also functions as a manifestation of the social solidarity of alienated ethnic youth.

At perhaps the deepest level, *caló* borders on and blends with delinquent cant and, though often used specifically to screen out those persons who do not share the values of extralegal life, still also serves to promote deflation of dignity, non-conventionality, group intimacy, status recognition, or all of these. (Webb 1975, 124-5)

Along with the social and behavioral similarities across these communities, those who belong to them use *caló* as a way of performing their identity as members of the in-group. In the words of one Chicana researcher concerning two Mexican American women who were participants in that lifestyle in Texas:

The adaptation of these linguistic codes [caló and taboo language] symbolized personal empowerment and assertiveness, affirmation of in-group membership, and the antithesis of silence and repression as they recounted experiences of pachuca activity, buying / selling/using drugs, and prison life. (Galindo 1999, 177)

Borrow observed that the Romany-based gypsy cant had become the basis for other criminal jargons in Europe, including the Spanish-based *caló* (1843, 332). Earlier discussions considered varieties of *caló* to be secret “languages” or special “codes”. However, as Coltharp pointed out for the Mexican American variety, “It uses, basically, the syntax of Spanish modified only in isolated instances by English syntax. The affixes and paradigms are Spanish. It cannot be called a ‘language’” (1965, 77). The main differences of these Spanish speech styles from the more widely-understood vernacular were not their core grammar underpinnings, but their lexical elements, through which meaning was regularly obfuscated via a variety of means.

In previous research on *caló* the emphasis placed on the creative use of language to reinforce the socially defiant, non-mainstream identity of the group is unmistakable. It is likely that these groups were and continue to be highly multiplex, tightly integrated, social networks of the type discussed by Milroy as “the sum of relationships which he or she has contracted with others” (1987, 105). As she elaborates:

This means that if an individual is embedded in such a network, s/he is more liable than one whose network is relatively loose-knit to be vulnerable to pressure exerted by everyday social contacts. This pressure may result in the maintenance of a set of norms—including linguistic norms---which then flourish in opposition to publicly legitimized norms. (Milroy 1987, 106)

Not only do the neologistic argot and taboo words create barriers of understanding and thereby symbolically reject publicly sanctioned registers, but the bilingual code in itself exhibits a rejection of the common mainstream norm of using one language at a time, one example of the “legitimized norms” mentioned by Milroy. The speech style is an *iconization* of the lifestyle, defiant of many mainstream norms and therefore symbolic of the group.

With Spanish providing the functional morphology, syntax and cohesion markers, speakers of these varieties are free to manipulate lexicon in order to at once obfuscate their meanings from the un-initiated and the unwelcomed and to mark their status as in-group members. The neologistic word-creations that melded English and Spanish, like *taiya* over *corbata* for “tie,” the nonsense extension of the affirmative *sí* to create *Simón*, as well as the shortening of known words like *pantas* from *pantalones*, all flew in the face of established norms of a monolingual Spanish language community to uniquely mark an ethnic identity that was neither completely Mexican nor completely American. Also included as part of the repertoire were terms that were typically of unknown origin to these speakers, but widely used, or at least widely-understood, such as *bato* to mean *hombre*, “man,” or *calcos* to mean *zapatos*, “shoes”—both traceable to the *gitano caló jergal*, or gypsy in-group slang, documented by Salillas (1896) as serving the undeniable if unconscious function of linking the two marginalized groups. The Pachuco speech style, which shuts out monolingual English and Spanish speakers alike, can be viewed as providing a cultural bond for Mexican Americans, who were often reprimanded for speaking Spanish at school, for not speaking “proper” Spanish and were subsequently denied schooling, housing and job opportunities in the United States Southwest at mid-century.

Linguistic style has been characterized by Eckert as “a clustering of linguistic resources, and an association

of that clustering with social meaning...” (2001, 123). The symbolic relationship between speech and identity has also been deemed “iconization” (Irvine 2001, 33), which the researcher labels “a semiotic process that transforms the sign relationship between linguistic features and the social images to which they are linked.” Coupland (2001) presents a comprehensive discussion of style which distinguishes the perspective of autonomous sociolinguistics from a more fluid characterization. In terms of conventional sociolinguistics, style is a ‘situational correlate’ (187), determined by the social situation in which speech occurs. His preferred perspective is one that explores the role of style in “... projecting speakers’ often-complex identities and in defining social relationships and other configurations of context” (186). In keeping with the second of these characterizations, the relationship between speech style and symbolic social meaning is clear for users of *caló*. That is, *caló* serves as a speech style that represents a constellation of behaviors shared by this type of marginalized youth group and so it is at once an iconization of its lifestyle and a symbolic expression of its attitudes toward the mainstream. For speakers in the greater Mexican American community who still know and use some of the traditional *caló* words and expressions, it is symbolic of their identity as bilingual, bicultural individuals and thus an iconization of the community’s historical ethnic and linguistic oppression.

The *caló* of Hispanic Youths in South Texas

It is not surprising that the linguistic study of *caló* speakers in the past yielded numerous lexical studies, glossaries, and dictionaries (e.g., Borrow 1843; Salillas 1896; Wagner 1955; Webb 1976 & 1982). The speech variety of each locale—*Andalucía*, *México*, the Southwestern United States—appear to have various lexical categories in common, such as: a) the retention of traditional terms, i.e., of *germanía* in *Andalucía* and of *gitano caló* in the U.S., b) neologisms, new words created by blending two

languages or simply by morphological manipulation of a root word, and c) semantic or syntactic calques from the contact language. Also typical of such *jergas* or argots is the frequent use of taboo expressions, which serve as blatant violations of conventional norms of speech. A more extensive discussion of the linguistic characteristics of *gitano* and Pachuco *caló* is presented elsewhere in detail (García 2005) and will not be repeated here. (However, see Appendices A and B for discourse segments of *gitano caló* and Pachuco *caló* from other published sources.)

The data used here to exemplify modern day *caló* were taken from interviews done with members of Hispanic gang members as part of a study by university colleagues on gang drug usage and gang drug dealing in South Texas (see Yin, et. al 2000). The research team followed rigorous procedures of random sampling, did social mapping to define sampling frames and did ethnographic fieldwork which established a network of contacts within the communities. The interviews were conducted by Mexican American fieldworkers who were known and trusted by the respondents, close in age but slightly older. Those interviews made available to this researcher were based on rigid protocols which often limited responses to questions, thereby limiting these observations about the nature of their linguistic practices. Some iconic characteristics of their argot emerge in their interviews, however, as will be demonstrated. The excerpts that will be presented here are representative of the longer stretches of discourse produced by some of these respondents in answer to questions which allowed for elaboration.

Spanish is used as the primary language of the first excerpt, and Spanish and English are both used in the second. The last excerpt reflects the language shift to English that is typical of younger generations of ethnic Chicanos. While the transmission of the *gitano caló* speech style to Chicano youths via Spanish and bilingual Spanish-English discourse is still of primary interest here, not

all Hispanic gangs have remained fluent in Spanish. The speech style used by English-dominant Hispanic youths illustrates the influence of African American Vernacular English (AAVE). The linguistic parallels between *caló* and the youth argot found in AAVE are striking, although not surprising. In the urban culture of the latter, as in the Chicano group, there is a positive value placed on verbal performance, including word play (e.g., rapping, playing the dozens, sounding), the invention of neologisms through word creation strategies, and the appropriation of a common word to serve another meaning (e.g., “fresh” and “bad” as positive terms). The same factors that explain the in-group speech style of Chicano homeboys also appear to be held in common by African American gang youths: socio-economic marginalization, a need for an identity outside of the general American mainstream, and an internal standard of ethics, among others. In short, despite having arisen from different linguistic roots, their linguistic similarities can be linked to their sharing similar communities of practice. The English-dominant Chicanos who practice a “homeboy” lifestyle appear to have appropriated AAVE street talk, which can be considered the English language version of the *caló* speech style. Subsequent sections of the present study present three excerpts: one from a predominantly Spanish-language interview, then a bilingual interview, and finally a predominantly English-language interview. Each will show a different level of loyalty to Spanish but all three illustrate a connection with the *caló* of the Spanish *gitanos*. The third will also show an alignment with African American gang youths’ communities of practice in their speech style.

Excerpt #1 - Alex, Laredo, age 14

The first excerpt is from a fourteen-year-old gang member, pseudonym “Alex,” from Laredo, Texas, a city on the Mexican border which is more Spanish-language retentive than San Antonio. He says that he was ten

years old when he was inducted into the gang:

INT: Otro pleito que haigas tenido. OKAY*, porque 'orita me dijiste que había diez— (ANOTHER FIGHT YOU HAD. OKAY, BECAUSE JUST NOW YOU SAID YOU HAD TEN—)

ALEX: Sí. (YES)

INT: OKAY. So piensa en otro que haigas tenido. ¿En dónde? (OKAY. SO THINK ABOUT ANOTHER ONE YOU HAD. WHERE?)

ALEX: Ajuera de la escuela. (OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL.)

INT: OKAY. ¿Con quién? (OKAY. WITH WHOM?)

ALEX: Con un muchachillón. Era RANK RELATED [sic]. (WITH A BOY. IT WAS GANG RELATED.)

INT: OKAY. ¿Qué-- ¿Cómo comenzó? (OKAY. HOW DID IT BEGAN?)

ALEX: Le comenzó hacer pedo a mi ruca. (HE BEGAN TO MESS WITH MY GIRL)

INT: OKAY. Este, ¿Y cuándo pasó esto? ¿Hace cómo qué tanto? (OKAY. UH, AND WHEN DID THIS HAPPEN? HOW LONG AGO?)

ALEX: Hace . . . TWO WEEKS. (IT WAS TWO WEEKS AGO)

INT: OKAY¿Y andabas loco tú? (OKAY. AND YOU WERE HIGH?)

ALEX: NO. Ni él. (NO, HIM NEITHER.)

[*In these discourse segments, English is shown in ALL CAPS as are translations into English. Typical slang or argot words and phrases are underlined. Nonstandard Spanish forms are typical of this regional dialect and are represented by means of nonstandard orthography.]

The dialogue continues in this vein, but Alex continues to use the normal vocabulary and pronunciation typical of working class Spanish. In this excerpt, only a few words and expressions are typical of *caló* speech. The first

is *hacer pedo*, literally, “make a fart” but interpreted metaphorically as meaning “to mess with”. The next is *ruca*, literally meaning “old lady” and by semantic extension meaning “woman, girl”. Both could be classified as *jerga mejicana* or contemporary Mexican slang, but both are slightly vulgar renderings of meanings that could be more politely stated. The metaphor *loco* “crazy” for “high” is also a semantic extension that is part of common slang. Other than these few expressions, this hour-long interview did not exhibit vocabulary and wordplay typical of Mexican American *caló*.

Excerpt #2 - Carlos, Laredo, age 16

The second excerpt is one in which switches between English and Spanish are frequent. Carlos is also from Laredo and is sixteen years old. Both he and the interviewer, a second-generation speaker, engage in the switching.

INT ¿Y qué era? Bironga, liquor— (AND WHAT WAS IT? BEER, LIQUOR, --)

CAR: Bironga, mota, chiva, soda. Traía de todo. (BEER, GRASS, COCAINE, SODA. THERE WAS EVERYTHING.)

INT: OKAY. SO THAT THEY WERE CHICKS, eran mostly, verdad? CHICKS que se juntan con ustedes, or eran las GIRLFRIENDS? (THEY WERE GIRLS, MOSTLY, RIGHT? GIRLS THAT GET TOGETHER WITH YOU, OR WERE THEY THE GIRLFRIENDS?)

CAR: Eran rucas que se juntan y unas eran sus camaradas. (THEY WERE GIRLS WHO GET TOGETHER AND SOME WERE THEIR FRIENDS.) Eran las GIRLFRIENDS de los vatos. (THEY WERE THE GIRLFRIENDS OF THE DUDES.)

INT: WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU WERE ALL JUST HANGING OUT, JUST KICKING?

CAR: Hace como—También unos THREE AND A

HALF MONTHS, algo... (IT WAS ABOUT THREE
AND A HALF MONTHS AGO, SOMETHING...)

In this excerpt some of the characteristic lexicon of traditional *caló* is evident. The extensive code-switching for these speakers appears to reflect a community norm in South Texas (Garcia 2009). Below is a list of the words that are traditional Pachuco or Mexico City *caló* as they fit into a taxonomy of *caló* speech (for more see Garcia 2005):

Word	Category	Explanation
<i>bironga</i>	neologism/anglicism	Play on English “beer” + <i>-onga</i>
<i>mota, chiva</i>	common slang	Slang for “marijuana” and “cocaine”
<i>rucas</i>	slang/pejorative reference	Pachuco slang for “girl”, lit. “old lady”
<i>camaradas</i>	slang/sem. extension	Pachuco slang, “comrades” for “friends”
<i>vato/bato</i>	gypsy origin	“man, dude”, from Sanskrit “old, great”

It can be seen from this wordlist that plays on words, metaphor, and slang (in the taboo semantic field of drugs) are still very much a part of Chicano youth *caló*. To be noted in particular is the word *vato* (also spelled *bato*), which originated as part of the *caló jergal* of the gypsies in the late nineteenth century (Salillas 1896). This word is still found in the slang of Spain today albeit with a different meaning, “father, old man”, attesting to the persistence of the lexicon of this type of ritualized speech.

Excerpt #3 - Raymond, San Antonio, age 16

The final excerpt is from an interview conducted in English in San Antonio in which the speaker is clearly English-dominant. Raymond was born in San Antonio, is sixteen years old, the son of Mexican immigrants. Although he is second-generation, he produces very little Spanish words emblematic of his Hispanic identity. The few that he produced in his interview, but are not used in the excerpted passage, included: *chingos de*, meaning “fucking lots of” and *chavalón/a* for “boy/girl,” of gypsy

origin, from Sanskrit *chaval'* "young goat". This excerpt illustrates the extensive use of slang from African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and street culture which seems to have replaced the Spanish-based *caló* of earlier generations. The AAVE street slang is underlined.

INT: Can you describe to me the last time you were partying? Like, you know, full-time partying?

RAY It was this Thursday with my homeboy. My homeboy's Dad, it was his birthday. We had the limo, we had the limo that we have and then we had rented another limo. No, it wasn't on Thursday. My bad. It was on a Sunday 'cause we had gone to Military. We went to Military [Rd] when we went to the Brack [Brackenridge Park] in the limo. Everybody was freaking out, 'cause our limo an' shit, it bombs, you know, "Boom, boom, boom." //Uh-huh//* An' shit, //Cool//* you know. It was bad-ass. We was just jammin' in there. And then when-- The other one, I was in the other one, the one that we rented. It was bigger and shit. It was a long-assed one. I was hanging out through the top and (it was like) "Nah, nah, nah. We're gonna get stopped." "I don't give a fuck. That's what you (got) paid for, right, mother-fucker? And they were like, saying a lot of Halleys. "What's up, mother-fuckers? (And I say), "I'm like the (town) an' everything an' shit. I was all fucked up."

[*Backslashes indicate the interviewer's interspersed comments, known as back-channeling. Parentheses indicate phrases that are not clear.]

The street slang used by Raymond has many things in common with what has been observed for Spanish *caló*,

such as neologisms and other innovative expressions characteristic of youth culture. The most salient expression of youth argot in this excerpt is the repeated use of taboo words that represent the teen's defiance of adult social norms. The fact that this teen's language reflects AAVE youth culture may simply be a byproduct of the pervasive influence of African-American culture on North American youth in general rather than of direct contact (see Fought 2006, 75). San Antonio has a very small percentage of this racial group in the city, less than 8%, whose neighborhoods are geographically segregated from the Hispanic parts of town. It appears that language shift to English in this community because of its distance from the Mexican border and low incidence of recent Spanish-speaking immigrants (Garcia 2003) has meant that speaking Spanish and *caló* use may not constitute an important behavior in the community of practice of Chicano gang youths in the San Antonio of the twenty-first century.

Conclusions

The similarities between gypsy *caló*, Mexican American Pachuco speech, and contemporary Chicano youth group slang are striking, considering their previously mentioned geographic and diachronic separation in space and time. Moreover, having traced their probable historical connection and their participation in similar communities of practice, I have proposed here that their membership in similar communities of practice has been a mechanism for the transmission and continuity of this Spanish-language speech style across the centuries and across an ocean. The iconic function of the shared speech style known as *caló* or Pachuco talk links these various communities in marking their marginalization, their perceived limited social mobility, and in-group identity. The real-life Pachuco of the 1940's appears to have become a cultural icon for many Mexican American youths of that period,

whose adoption of the speech style was a means to express their defiance of convention and their unique bilingual identity. Later generations extended some of the lexicon of the Pachuco's argot to everyday use in the community, but the persistence of a secret code in bilingual youth gangs attests to the need for such a code in these communities of practice. The corresponding English-based speech style of some modern-day Chicano "homeboys" which absorb the in-group lexicon and expressions typical of African American street vernaculars is no less defiant of the norms of "proper" English than its predecessor. Although without the Spanish base it may no longer, strictly speaking, be called *caló*, the in-group speech style of these youths appears to follow in the traditions of its gypsy and Pachuco predecessors in its alignment with a similar community of practice.

Currently language shift to English for the younger generations may be creating schisms across the community based on language dominance and linguistic allegiance, as well as social factors. New waves of immigrants from Mexico and other Spanish-speaking countries are creating their own speech communities. Undoubtedly, they still employ a *jerga*, 'slang', and quite possibly an argot that is descendant of gypsy *caló*. The excerpts from these three interviews show that Chicano youth in South Texas have repertoires that range from monolingual Spanish to extensive code-switching or to monolingual English with strong influence from AAVE. While some of the vocabulary used reflects the traditional Spanish *caló* of the Pachuco days, the fact that its use is limited to only a few words indicates that in some of these communities a language shift to English appears to be underway. Although the speech samples obtained did not reflect the most informal register of these youths, it is significant that they showed characteristics of the type of argot used in the past in similar communities of practice. As in the past, not all youths in marginalized communities are

defiant of societal sanctions, but those who continue to assert their “otherness” today appear to reaffirm their identity by means of a speech style handed down over the centuries.

Appendix A: *Gitano caló jergal* [Gypsy jail slang]

The following discourse samples were said by a young man incarcerated in Madrid, cited in Salillas (1896). The translations to English are those of the present author.

Sample 1: Un robo [A robbery]

Vamos a **chalar** á un **dron** á **randar** porque **chala** un **busnó** con mucho **sonague**; va montado en una **berda**. [We’re going to go down the road for a robbery because there is a stranger there with a lot of dough in a wagon.] (242)

chalar=marchar, caminar; **dron**=camino; **randar**=robar;
busnó=estraño, paleta; **sonague (N)**=oro; **berda**=carro.
(Salillas 1896, 242)

Sample 2: Un engaño [A deception]

Vamos a llevarle a ese **eray** un **gras** **nililo**, porque **tenela** muchos **jallares** y vamos a **engañisarle**. [We’re going to take that gentleman a crazy horse, because he has a lot of riches and we’re going to trick him.](242)

eray=caballero; **gras**=caballo, **nililo**=loco; **tenelar**,
engañisarle=alargamientos de los verbos tener y engañar;
jallares o **jayeres**=hacienda, fortuna. (Salillas 1896, 242-3)

Sample 3: Una seducción [A seduction]

¿Tú te **camelas** **aviyar** con á **manguis**? A **manguis** **tenelo** muchos **jayeres** para **diñártelos** a **tuguis** para que **jalleles** y **vistisieres**. Comprendo que **tenelas** otro **manus**, pero yo **tenelo** más **pelés** que él y se la voy á **quitizarar**. [Do you want to come with me? I have a lot of money to give you for you to spend and dress well. I understand that you have another man, but I have more balls than he and I am going to take you away from him.] (243)

camelar=querer; abillar=venir; manguis=conmigo;
jayeres=dinero; diñar=dar; tuguís=ti; jalleles=cobres;
vistisieres=vistas; manus=hombre; pelés=cojones;
quitizarar=quitar. (Salillas 1986, 242-3)

The themes in these discourse samples are in keeping with the illicit activities of criminals. Although each is brief, there are enough Spanish function words and some content words that allow a speaker of Spanish to understand it somewhat, but not completely. The in-group agenda of hiding meaning is achieved by using words from *germania* (the past-generation's criminal jargon) and by neologisms, literally "new words", derived from wordplay in Spanish and Romany.

APPENDIX B: Pachuco *caló* [The Pachuco argot]

By way of illustrating the Pachuco *caló* of the 1940's-'60's, the following dialogue is reported to be from an authentic tape-recording made in El Paso, Texas, transcribed and published in Sánchez (1994 [1984], 129-132). Much of the discourse is accessible to modern day bilingual Chicano/as raised in barrios where Mexican Spanish is spoken. Recent immigrants from Mexico may recognize it as how the older generation spoke. The meanings of the words in **bold** are taken, in part, from Sanchez' word lists in the same source. The underlined words appear in the *caló jergal* 'prison slang' dictionary in Salillas (1896). The translations to English are those of the present author.

El Paso *Caló* Dialogue

--Guacha, ¿por qué no me **alivianas** con un **aventón** y me dejas en el **chante**? Y mientras que vas por el Chente, yo tiro **claváo**, me **rastío** la **greña** y me **entacucho**. Te traís al Chenete a mi **cantón** y le digo a la **jefa** que nos **aliviane** con un **calmante** porque a mí ya me traí la **jaspia** y quiero **refinar**. Le dices al Chente que 'stoy invitáo a un **borlo** y pa que se **desaguite** el vato le digo a mi **guisa** que le consiga una **jainita** para irnos a **borlotear** todos. [Look, why don't you help me out with a ride and leave me at my place? And while you go for Vince, I'll take a bath, comb my hair, and get dressed. You bring Vince back to my shack and I'll ask my Mom to give us us a meal because I'm dying of hunger and I've got to eat. Tell Vince that I'm invited to a dance and so that the dude can get out of the dumps. I'll tell my girlfriend to get him a girl so we can all go out partying.]

guachar=mirar; **alivianar**=ayudar; **aventón**=llevar en auto; **chante**=casa; **tiro claváo**=me baño; **rastrío la greña**=me peino (el pelo); **me entacucho**=me visto; **cantón**=casa; **jefa**=mamá; **calmante**=algo de comer; **jaspia**=hambre; **refinar**=comer; **borlo**=baile, fiesta; **desaguite**=se ponga alegre; **vato**=muchacho; **guisa**=chica, muchacha; **jainita**=chica, muchacha

--Pos, 'stá **de aquella** la idea pero, pos tú sabes que el Chente va andar muy **quebradón** porque acaba . . . va acabar de **desafanar** y no trai **garra de aquella**. ¿Cómo la ves? [Well, it's a terrific idea but, well you know that Vincent is going to be very broke because he. . . he'll be just out of jail and he doesn't have good clothes. What do you think?]

--O, dile que no se **aguite**. Le dices que **no hay fijón** por la feria y si necesita **garra**, yo le **empresto pantas**, **lisa**, **taiya**, **carlangos**, **calcós**, y hasta **calcetas** si quiere. Sirve que cuando 'stemos **refinando** quiero que oiga unas **rolas** que **aparé** ora, ¿ves? 'Tan a todo **guelo**. ¡Tú sabes las **songas** que hay orita 'tan a todo **guelo**! [Oh, tell him not to feel bad. Tell him that it doesn't matter about the dough and if he needs clothes I'll lend him some pants, a shirt, a tie, a jacket, shoes and even socks if he wants. It's just that while we're eating I want him to hear some records that I bought today, see? They're totally awesome. You know that the songs that are out today are totally awesome!]

de aquella=magnífico; **quebradón**=sin dinero; **desafanar**=salir de la cárcel; **garra**=ropa; **aguitarse**=deprimirse; **no hay fijón**=no importa; **feria**=dinero; **emprestar**=prestar; **pantas**=pantalones; **lisa**=camisa; **taiya**=corbata; **carlangos**=chaqueta; **calcós**=zapatos; **calcetas**=calcetines; **refinando**=comiendo; **rolas**=discos; **aparar**=comprar; **songas**=canciones; **a todo guelo (vuelo)**=fantástico.

--**Orale pues**. 'Tonces ahí te **guacho** en tu **cantón**. Pero también le dices a la **jefita** que me **aliviane** con un **refinazo**, ¿eh? Y que no se le olvide los **biroles**, porque tú sabes como me cain **de aquéllas** los **biroles**, ¿eh? 'Tá **de aquella**. [Sounds good. So then I'll see you at your place. But also ask your Mom to give me something to eat, huh? And don't let her forget the beans, because you know how I love beans, huh? They're awesome.]

órale, pues=de acuerdo; **biroles**=frijoles

--**Simón que yes, ese**. 'Tonces aquí te . . . ahí **te calmo** después que me dejes, ¿eh? !'Tá **de aquella**! [Sure thing, guy. Then here . . . I'll

see you there after you drop me off, huh? Terrific idea!]

Simón que yes=claro que sí, hombre; te calmo=te veo

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***Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* Education and Abolition**

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Some thirty years before Harriet Ann Jacobs opened the Jacobs Free School in Alexandria, Virginia in January 1864, one of her first students was her fifty-three-year-old uncle, Fred. The seventeen-year-old Harriet appreciated her uncle's "most earnest desire to learn to read" and promised to teach him.¹ As slaves, both teacher and student risked the punishment of "thirty-nine lashes on [the] bare back" as well as imprisonment for violating North Carolina's anti-literacy laws targeting African Americans.² Nevertheless they agreed to meet three times a week in a "quiet nook" where she instructed him in secret.³ While the primary goal for him was to read the Bible, this moment in Jacobs' slave narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* revealed her early commitment to African American literacy and education as well as her rejection of the laws of American slavery. In that moment, the vocations of education and abolition took root for Harriet Jacobs.

Throughout her life, Harriet Jacobs embraced the twin vocations of educator and abolitionist. To expose slavery as a “pit of abominations” not only helped to undermine it, but by educating African Americans she frustrated the very idea of African American inferiority upon which slavery had been built.⁴ *Incidents* is thus not only an account of the experiences she endured as an enslaved African American woman, but also, in light of her public activities as an educator and abolitionist, a text intended to enlighten white Northern women on why and how American slavery should be abolished. Considering these aims, it is no wonder that, in a letter to her friend Amy Post, Jacobs expressed feeling somewhat conflicted about writing her life story.⁵ Exposing in shrewd detail the institution of American slavery ostensibly meant, for Jacobs, exposing, among others things, her sexual abuse “for the world to read.”⁶ With the same daring approach that she used to teach her uncle Fred to read and write, she intended to educate the hearts and minds of women in the North on the issue of African American enslavement and the notion of racial equality.

Born into slavery in Edenton, North Carolina in 1813, Harriet Jacobs had no formal education and she recognized the limits of her informal education as a slave, a fugitive slave, and, later, a free African American woman.⁷ Like Jacobs, many enslaved African Americans yearned to gain knowledge, but most slaveholders forbade it. Instead, they attempted to reinforce a “sense of innate inferiority” among slaves so as to mold them into being obedient and submissive.⁸ Yet, as historian Thomas Webber argues, enslaved African Americans, for the most part, did not absorb these teachings; rather, they developed their own ways of making sense of the world.⁹ For instance, when Jacobs’ father taught her “to *feel* that African Americans [are] human beings,” she realized that slaveholders regarded African American humanity as “blasphemous doctrine.”¹⁰ Thus the white slaveholder’s teachings collided with the teachings of her father, and

as a result, she learned to challenge the conception of African American slaves as merely “property,” and thus inferior, anything but “human.” This epiphany, however, can be considered a product of her informal education, which she certainly regarded as vital to her intellectual growth.

After Jacobs escaped to the North sometime in June 1842, the antislavery lecture tour became a forum where she conversed with abolitionists who supported the abolition of slavery and the fight for racial equality. This kind of informal education arguably prepared her and other African American abolitionists to lay claim to the rights and obligations of American citizenship. Still, according to Jacobs, none of those informal educational moments could stand in the place of a formal education, which probably explains why she worked to send her children to school. Indeed, in the second paragraph of her preface, she told her readers about her hard work to support herself as well as to provide an “education for her children.”¹¹ Whether it was her son Joseph’s experience with racism in the North or her daughter Louisa’s illiteracy, *Incidents* seems to be preoccupied with the benefits of informal and formal education, especially as education became crucial in the fight for African American equality during and after the antebellum era. Hence Jacobs acknowledged, in her narrative, the importance of both approaches in the lives of African Americans.

Rarely do historians reflect upon how *Incidents* not only established Jacobs as an abolitionist but as an educator, nor do many examine her educational approach specifically in light of the establishment of the Jacobs Free School three years after the publication of *Incidents*.¹² I take up these issues in this article. I contend that Jacobs dispensed her own educational philosophy throughout *Incidents* to counter the dehumanizing aspects of American slavery, thereby dismantling the arguments by American slaveholders that African Americans were inferior and submissive. But even more important, Jacobs

sought to arm African Americans and their white allies with the critical tools necessary to disarm American slavery and white racism. By analyzing *Incidents* in this fashion, this article places Harriet Jacobs in the long tradition of African American women educators while also revealing how African Americans conceived of education on the continuum from slavery to freedom. Not only were African American women key to the development of education as an ideal in antebellum America, but also, collectively, they viewed African American education as central to the program of racial uplift and social justice. The first part of this paper offers thus a textual analysis of *Incidents* meant to establish certain educational tenets that I believe Harriet Jacobs developed and adopted when she opened her school. The second part focuses on African American education and antislavery activity among African American women in the North. The last section explores the development of the Jacobs Free School in Alexandria, Virginia.

What Slavery Wrought: An Examination of *Incidents*

Incidents condemned cruel American slaveholders for their foul, dishonest, and corrupt teachings, which were intended to dehumanize and subjugate African Americans. Indeed, American slaveholders tried to convince enslaved African Americans that they had no humanity, no right or claim to religious education, to basic literacy or education, and no intellectual faculties at all. African Americans were, in essence, according to these teachings, inferior. Historians like George Fredrickson and Heather Williams have pointed out that the ideology of African American inferiority became a rationale supporting slavery well into the early nineteenth century.¹³ To survive the institution, Jacobs developed tactics that allowed her to navigate the oppressive slave environment until she eventually escaped to freedom in June 1842. Before that, she spoke of the many years in bondage that gave her the ability

“to read the characters, and question the motives” of white slaveholders.¹⁴ When her father died, she could not pay her respects because her mistress demanded that she pick flowers for a party.¹⁵ Yet Jacobs, to comfort herself, recalled her father teaching her that slaves were human beings. Hence her condemnation of slavery allowed her to exhort the North to agitate against slavery and it also offered her an opportunity to describe how African Americans often learned to resist and reject the cruelty of slavery by practicing a distinct sense of kinship and community comprised of a belief in the values of self-definition and self-determination.

Part of Jacobs’ educating enterprise included teaching white women of the North to challenge their value assumptions, especially when considering the experiences of enslaved African American women. The ideal of womanhood that white women of the North laid claim to were such as to exclude enslaved African American women completely. As literary scholar Hazel Carby argues in *Reconstructing Womanhood*, the standards of white womanhood did not apply to the lived experiences of enslaved African American women. The very notion of the “beautiful” African American woman left her vulnerable to sexual abuse. Enslaved African American women were thus set apart from “respectable” womanhood.¹⁶ For Jacobs, the heinous acts of physical and sexual abuse committed by slaveholders illustrated slavery’s “deeper wrong,” which, interestingly, was the title for the British publication of *Incidents* in 1862.¹⁷ In *Incidents*, she appealed to white women of the North to help abolish slavery, an institution that clearly threatened and violated the enslaved African American woman. Furthermore, her need to educate the public on this matter compelled her to continue writing despite her misgivings. As such, the pen became a necessary tool for instruction.

In the South, slaveholders and their militias often tried to police slave literacy, especially after Nat Turner’s

rebellion erupted in Southampton County, Virginia in August 1831. Since many slaveholders believed that slave literacy begat slave insurrection, the only proof needed to condemn a slave was provocatively written materials. In *Incidents*, Harriet Jacobs recalled that white militias in her neighborhood of Edenton, North Carolina ransacked slave cabins in search of any kind of writing and even robbed, whipped, beat, and killed slaves who had been suspected of insurrection. Made up of poor, illiterate whites, these militias, according to Jacobs, failed to realize that “the power which trampled the colored people also kept themselves in poverty, ignorance, and moral degradation.”¹⁸ While searching her grandmother’s cabin, the militia found a few letters written by Jacobs and immediately showed them to the captain who then questioned her. Upon finding out about her literacy, the captain “swore, and raved, and tore the paper into bits.”¹⁹ This reaction coupled with the hysteria surrounding Turner’s rebellion clearly demonstrated that slave literacy troubled many slaveholders. In this scene Jacobs showed that African Americans valued reading and writing, and she alerted her readers to the situation of poor whites who also fell victim to the slave power. Thus *Incidents* “foreground[ed] the idea of textuality—or the fact and function of writing,” and, in the process, subverted prevailing myths about slavery and African American inferiority.²⁰ Jacobs gave her targeted readership—white women of the North—a new kind of education, a counternarrative, so to speak.

In her introduction to *Incidents*, abolitionist Lydia Maria Child offered three explanations for Jacobs’ strong writing skills, one of which she attributed to Jacobs’ mistress, who “was a kind, considerate friend, who taught [Jacobs] to read and spell.”²¹ Yet the institution of slavery did not even allow Jacobs’ mistress to recognize her as anything but a slave. That was, in a sense, her mistress’ illiteracy. The ambivalence for Jacobs was the bitter realization that her mistress, whom she loved,

never recognized her as a neighbor yet bestowed upon her the privilege of reading, “which rarely [fell],” according to Jacobs, “to the lot of a slave.”²² Though she could not liberate her mistress, she did “bless her memory.”²³ Frederick Douglass described an analogous moment in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* when his mistress, Mrs. Auld, taught him to read and write, but stopped after her husband forbade it. For Douglass, this moment represented how easily slavery could corrupt an individual’s kindness; slavery, despite what its supporters claimed, was not a benevolent or paternalistic institution. Likewise Harriet Jacobs unveiled this world of oppression on her own terms, and through informed action, committed, and called upon others, to commit toward achieving “permanent liberation.”²⁴ Unlike her mistress’ teachings, Jacobs’ pedagogy was to empower, to increase one’s feeling of power in the face of deliberate disempowerment. Moreover, she and many other literate slaves viewed reading and writing as collective endeavors, not autonomous activities. Hence Jacobs did not object to teaching her uncle Fred or reading newspapers to other slaves in the community.

Many African Americans resisted the corrupt teachings of American slavery by maintaining a sense of kinship and community through which knowledge was shared and exchanged. What facilitated this climate, political scientist Gayle Tate argues, was the “collective resistance” of the “kinship network of family.”²⁵ In *Unknown Tongues*, Tate explains that the actions and strategies of African American women as political activists came directly from their African past, their experiences to maintain a family and community during slavery, and from their efforts to create a viable free African American community in urban Northern cities like Boston and New York. Even though Jacobs’ political activism began at a very early age, it arguably crystallized when she taught her fifty-three-year-old uncle Fred to read and write. There she experienced an epiphany: The North

Carolina anti-literacy law that she broke did not reflect her own misconduct but rather impugned slaveholders who withheld basic human and civil rights from African Americans in the name of property and profit. In fact, she chastised white slaveholders in her narrative, telling them that they will have “to answer to God for sealing up the Fountain of Life from souls that are thirsting for it.”²⁶ Uncle Fred wanted to quench his thirst for religious literacy and education specifically, so when he observed that the white man “larn easy” and “got all de sense,” he spoke not of innate white superiority and African American inferiority per se but instead stated plainly what the unequal distribution of educational resources had wrought.²⁷ Uncle Fred knew that legal and extralegal challenges prohibited African American literacy and education; comparatively no oppressive forces prohibited the white man from the practice of learning. In this instance, Jacobs’ self-awareness coupled with the earlier teachings of her father triggered her resistance. By demonstrating the importance of literacy in the life of a slave, Jacobs critiqued the proposed method of denying an education to African Americans; for not only was slavery an intolerable institution, as Jacobs learned, it was dangerous and violent too.

Resistance, for the African American slave, also included learning to operate within the corrupt system of American slavery in order to gain some semblance of justice. In *Incidents*, Jacobs told the story of Luke who had endured extreme hardships as a slave, including physical abuse. When he finally reached the North, he had a chance meeting with Jacobs. He told her that he planned to flee to Canada, which for many slaves and fugitive slaves symbolized the “only real Canaan of the American bondman.”²⁸ Furthermore, the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 made the North unsafe territory for the fugitive slave since this federal law demanded that Northern white citizens aid in the capture of fugitive slaves or risk fines and imprisonment. To aid

his own escape, Luke depended on the money that his white master tried to deny him but that he found a way to procure anyway. Specifically, Luke hid some money in the pocket of his dead owner's trousers so that when the master was buried, he simply asked for, and subsequently was given, said trousers. At first glance, this act of justice comes across as being an act of deceit, but, as Luke reasoned, "You see I didn't *steal* it; dey *gub* it to me."²⁹ This moment appeared in Jacobs' narrative well after she detailed the degrading aspects of slavery; Jacobs, then, unapologetically condoned Luke's subversive act. First, she pointed to slave law that sanctioned the theft of wages from African Americans to support her stance. Second, she argued that the corrupt system of slavery did not allow for an enslaved African American to recover his stolen wages in any other way except through trickery.³⁰ For her, Luke's actions illustrated "how the moral sense is educated by slavery."³¹ Although her audience may have wanted to pass judgment on Luke, she taught them that any judgment upon him would be misplaced; rather, she attacked the institution of slavery, exposing its immorality and inequality as well as its systematic brutality of enslaved African Americans.

After reading *Incidents*, it becomes clear how tied Jacobs' educational tenets were to, what we might call now, social justice principles, consisting of equal parts activism, resistance, and community. While she recognized that slavery perverted the moral sense, she believed that justice could be restored to mankind, and the first step in that process was reshaping the American mind through education.³² Whether it was her teaching her uncle Fred to read and write or her rejection of the teachings of slaveholders, Jacobs believed in the power of education. In fact, her entire narrative represented just this claim. Rhetorically, *Incidents* took its form from the sentimental novel, but Jacobs made it her own by molding it to fit her purposes.³³ She underscored the importance of community and kinship but also stressed the significance

of self-definition and self-determination. Her belief in the power of education to bring about social change, even while a slave, was radical, which may explain, at least in part, why she supported reforming America as opposed to abandoning the nation. Although her preface clearly stated that *Incidents* was meant to “arouse” white women of the North, her narrative also spoke to the African American community, especially educated African Americans.³⁴ Parts of her narrative, then, can be read like a treatise on the value and import of formal education to secure civic rights. Yet even Jacobs recognized that white racism and white supremacy were prevalent in the non-slaveholding North in the mid-nineteenth century and had to be countered there as well.

African American Education in the North

While living in the North, Harriet Jacobs attended antislavery lectures, participated in abolitionist organizations and associations, and, according to her friend, editor, and fellow abolitionist Lydia Maria Child, frequently interacted with “intelligent persons who... [gave] her opportunities for self-improvement.”³⁵ Her attendance at various antislavery meetings certainly contributed to this self-improvement, but the fact that her brother John S. Jacobs was a well-known abolitionist lecturer most certainly proved valuable to her self-education. For instance, John S. Jacobs spoke at a “meeting of colored citizens” in New York City protesting the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, which Harriet Jacobs likely attended because, at that time, she worked for the Willis family in New York.³⁶ Even though the antislavery lecture tour acted as an informal kind of education, it educated Harriet Jacobs in ways that challenged the core teachings of slavery. The antislavery circuit became central to the training of African American activists as they learned the art of rhetoric and worked to build strong communication networks. Interestingly, Frederick Douglass said that he received his own higher

education from “Massachusetts University, Mr. [William Lloyd] Garrison, President.”³⁷ The influence of the abolitionist movement on African Americans cannot be underestimated. Jacobs adopted an activist model for own education; her educational mode was thus public, not private. An 1837 article in the African American newspaper, *Weekly Advocate*, pointed to the influential power of women educators to correct misrepresentations in the public mind and “to show the world that there is virtue... talent... and intelligence among African Americans.”³⁸ Thus, we can see that African American women like Harriet Jacobs were at the center of African American education in antebellum America.

Free African American women in the North contributed to educational initiatives in their communities and they also spoke out on political issues. Their direct involvement in the antislavery reform movement arguably expanded the meaning of abolition to include educational opportunity and the fight for racial equality. However, being an antislavery activist in the North did not necessarily imply agreement with the notion of racial equality. Indeed, many white antislavery activists who vehemently opposed the institution of slavery did not view African Americans as equals. For example, membership in female antislavery societies was often closed to African American women. To resolve entrenched racial assumptions regarding membership, some white female antislavery societies reluctantly incorporated African American women. Unfortunately, as historian Julie Roy Jeffrey notes, African American women were too often, regarded as “an addition and an afterthought, if not second-class members.”³⁹ Yet African American women who joined antislavery societies alongside white women demanded respect, forcing white women to face their own racism. For those white women who believed in the struggle against slavery as well as the fight for racial equality, a real sense of interracial cooperation developed.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, African Americans, in their

attempt to abolish racial discrimination in public education, encountered various problems, ranging from financial hardships to a lack of resources, as they tried to establish and run independent schools. Despite the white hostility directed toward African American education, African American women like Sarah Mapps Douglass and white women like Prudence Crandall devoted themselves to teaching and, in urban areas where a large African American population existed, quite a few independent schools progressed.

Before, during, and after the establishment of independent schools in the North for African Americans, literary societies acted as de facto educational institutions. Early literary societies, particularly, in the urban North in the late 1820s, offered, for instance, lectures, seminars, literary performances, and exhibitions to educate African Americans. In her narrative, Jacobs tracked her own efforts and that of her brother, John S. Jacobs, to open an antislavery reading room and bookstore in Rochester, New York. Unlike her brother, Harriet Jacobs did not get very involved in the antislavery movement when she arrived in the North in 1842; as such, a reading room probably took on greater meaning to her because, in a pragmatic sense, it represented something she could accomplish.⁴¹ Moreover, a reading room would fulfill various educational objectives, provide ready access to antislavery materials, and perhaps even promote a literary sensibility that merged the creative with the political. In *Forgotten Readers*, literary critic Elizabeth McHenry argues that African American literary societies, which included reading rooms, provided “self-improvement and refuge” and stood as models of resistance.⁴² Moreover, literary societies offered a forum for African Americans to “voice their demands for citizenship and equal participation.”⁴³ Literacy was important to these demands as was a formal education. In 1849, Jacobs opened the reading room and bookstore directly above Frederick Douglass’ office where he worked on his newspaper, *North Star*.

Though antislavery friends patronized the reading room, it eventually folded because the abolitionist sentiment was not large enough in that area to “support such an establishment” over the long term.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, recounting this initiative in *Incidents* not only surely showed her readers that African Americans had a literary sensibility, but it also showed them that, with ambition and support, they could and probably should pursue similar kinds of educational initiatives.

African American mothers in the North, and clearly some in the South, as evidenced by Jacobs, stressed the value of education to their children. Maria W. Stewart, the first American woman to speak in public on political issues, inspired African American and white women to contribute to the fight for racial equality by educating young African Americans at the elementary and secondary levels. Published in Garrison’s antislavery newspaper the *Liberator* in October 1831, Maria Stewart’s tract on the principles of morality opined that African American mothers had the duty to instill in their children “a thirst for knowledge.”⁴⁵ Harriet Jacobs fought for that education for her own children; she told her readers not once, not twice, but three times that the money she earned, working in domestic service for the Willis family, was “devote[d] to the education” of her children, Louisa and Joseph.⁴⁶ Since she was unable to care for her children while hiding in her grandmother’s attic, and also because she feared for their safety, she decided to have her grandmother care for Joseph. She agreed to place her seven-year-old daughter, Louisa, in the care of the Hobbs family of Brooklyn, New York primarily because educational opportunities would be available to her there. When Jacobs arrived in the North and learned that Louisa had been working as a domestic servant and had not gone to school at all, she felt betrayed. The Hobbs family had kept Louisa in a “state of ignorance” by limiting her knowledge, and Jacobs believed that they deemed Louisa’s illiteracy and overall lack of an education as fit

for the “condition of a slave.”⁴⁷ Despite that blow, Jacobs continued her quest to educate her children by tutoring her daughter until she could “enter an intermediate school.”⁴⁸ Just as Jacobs occupied her time while in hiding, she sewed while her children read their books. To be sure, she did not neglect her children’s education, which certainly challenged prevailing stereotypes that circulated about African American women such as that of the Mammy, who was often depicted as taking care of the master’s children first as opposed to her own, or the Jezebel, who was depicted as lascivious, promiscuous, and un-motherly.⁴⁹ Jacobs crushed both of these negative stereotypes in her narrative by stressing the importance of education in the life of her children and her own life. Likewise, in her role as an educator, she even supported the notion of white women educating themselves and subsequently their children by using her own experiences as an example.

Although Joseph and Louisa had different educational experiences in the North, the common thread in their experiences was the pervasive racism in the North. At first, Joseph was well liked by his fellow apprentices and his instructor at trade school, but when they discovered his African American ancestry, the school became an inhospitable place. His fellow apprentices scorned him ostensibly because “it was offensive to their dignity to have a “nigger” among them.”⁵⁰ Unsure of where to turn, he left the trade school and decided to “ship for a whaling voyage.”⁵¹ Meanwhile, John S. Jacobs found a boarding school in Clinton, New York called the Young Ladies Domestic Seminary to send Louisa. Operated by Reverend Hiram H. Kellogg, this boarding school, established in 1832, was one of the few schools to accept African American women as students. The educational aims of this seminary included providing a “thorough, Christian education” to people of limited means.⁵² Opportunities arose for employment at the school such as domestic work for those students who could not pay the full tuition. Many

students who graduated from this seminary got involved in missionary work, which was fitting considering Louisa's involvement in aiding freedpeople after the Civil War. Louisa only spent a year at the Young Ladies Domestic Seminary, entering in 1849, and then leaving a year later when the institution closed its doors. Jacobs recounted these moments of racial inequality in order to detail how free African Americans in the non-slaveholding North still struggled amid the prevalence and pervasiveness of white racism.

When Jacobs traveled to England with the Willis family in March 1846, she saw schools there that possessed what American schools lacked: equality and opportunity. "Schools were established among them [poor whites]," she wrote, "and benevolent societies were active in efforts to ameliorate their condition. There was no law forbidding them to learn to read and write."⁵³ For Jacobs, England exemplified equal access to education, which ostensibly America should try to emulate. Moreover, she reminded her readers that abolishing slavery and fighting to achieve racial equality in America went hand-in-hand. Although African Americans had little access to public education in the antebellum North, teaching became one way for African American and white women "to express an abolitionist commitment."⁵⁴ What made *Incidents* therefore such a radical narrative was that Jacobs believed in educating African Americans and she called on white women to come into the public sphere as educators; they needed to be, according to her, as active as she was.

Jacobs Free School

As I have argued earlier, Harriet Jacobs reshaped her life and the lives of her children through education, which the abolitionist movement nurtured, providing spaces and interactions for formal and informal kinds of education. This knowledge was indispensable, and just as she aimed to teach white women of the North, so too

did she commit to teaching African Americans, albeit for a slightly different purpose. Equipping African Americans with an education provided them with a set of tools that could help them as they transitioned from slavery to freedom. Given her experiences, it is no surprise that Jacobs saw education as struggle; the quest for education was tied up with this quest for self-definition and self-determination, which slaveholders tried to withhold. Considering her reform efforts, she arguably saw that the only real way to reform American society was through struggle, to which those who belonged to the African American protest tradition knew. Hence, after the publication of *Incidents* in 1861, Harriet Jacobs decided to put all of her energy into education, not so much through writing or moral suasion as she had done earlier, but rather through working directly with African American freedpeople. When President Abraham Lincoln announced his preliminary emancipation proclamation in September 1862, Jacobs, like many other abolitionist women, became even more committed to relief work.

African Americans played a major role during the Civil War with African American men enlisting as soldiers and African American women serving as nurses, seamstresses, or cooks. In fact, during this time, African American women began to exercise more power and control over their lives. Historian Martha S. Jones asserts that African American women made their own “independent decision in a climate that welcomed...their assertions of public standing.”⁵⁵ Their involvement allowed them to assert African American freedom as well as claim a public political voice, as seen in the case of African American female relief workers and educators like Mary S. Peake, Susie King Taylor, and Charlotte Forten, to name only a few. African American writers like Frances E.W. Harper also contributed to this claim of an independent, political voice. Though appearing years after the Civil War, Harper’s novel *Iola Leroy* was directed toward those African American leaders who could re-establish and lead

a dynamic community into the twentieth century. Harper showed her protagonist, Iola Leroy, moving down to the South to help teach African Americans, which put African American educators at the forefront of the racial and social uplift of the African American community.

Establishing the Jacobs Free School was not just about knowledge-building; it meant building freedom and uniting the community.⁵⁶ After collecting funds from northern philanthropists and other benevolent organizations such as the New England Freedmen's Aid Society, Harriet Jacobs brought two African American teachers with her to Alexandria, Virginia: her daughter, Louisa, and Sarah Virginia Lawton, a Massachusetts native from a prominent family. Interestingly Jacobs tried to recruit Charlotte Forten who had already arrived in the Sea Islands in South Carolina in October 1862 and taught school in a Baptist church along with two other female teachers.⁵⁷ Though Forten's journal entries at times contain remarks seemingly written by a "ethnocentric observer," her comments on African American education revealed quite a bit: "I wish some of those persons at the North who say the race is hopelessly and naturally inferior, could see the readiness with which these children, so long oppressed and deprived every privilege, learn and understand."⁵⁸ Forten's firsthand account refuted notions of African American inferiority and instead captured the willingness and eagerness of African American children to learn. Jacobs and her daughter held similar feelings. In a letter to Lydia Maria Child, the Jacobses specifically mentioned the children who "accepted our invitation to go to school, and so did all the parents for them."⁵⁹ With the opportunity to seek an education, African American children and adults welcomed the opportunity for learning because, for once, no laws forbade their literacy and knowledge.

Nevertheless when Northern middle-class white women went to the South to establish schools for freedpeople and to engage in teaching African American

children and adults, they often imposed Northern educational standards, to which Jacobs objected.⁶⁰ In March 1864, Jacobs ran into some financial difficulty after almost all of the donations for her school had been exhausted. In what would become a teaching moment, Jacobs encouraged African Americans to fundraise in order to support the completion of the new schoolhouse. While she acknowledged that they had to “struggle along to help themselves,” she saw this moment as an opportunity to instill in them the values of self-reliance and community-building, which had not been adequately taught by Northern middle-class white women. The African American community in Alexandria raised the money needed to complete the building by hosting a fair, which enlisted the help of free African American women. This particular move was a strategic one by Jacobs, not only for its intended value to teach self-reliance, but also to break the tension among free African Americans who “feared” the “great influx of degraded contrabands would drag them all down to the same level in social estimation.”⁶¹ Jacobs “[broke] up this selfish, aristocratic notion,” hoping instead to bring African Americans together.⁶² White Northern women often overlooked these class tensions, but Jacobs, acutely aware of them because of her experiences in the South and the North, wanted to address them head-on in order to mobilize and unite the community.

Harriet Jacobs also wanted African Americans to learn the value of self-sufficiency and autonomy, two characteristics Northern white women often ignored in their teaching. One way to promote these values was on the practical level by privileging the autonomy of African American institutions. In a letter quoted in the “Report of Friends’ Association for the Aid and Elevation of Freedmen,” dated March 22, 1864, Jacobs referred to the ten schools for African Americans that had been built, the largest of which was built by the freedmen who had full ownership of the property.⁶³ What she omitted in this

letter was the fact that this building housed the Jacobs Free School. Since freedpeople had built their own school, they had the power to make their own decisions. One of the questions that arose about school was whether white teachers or African American teachers would manage it. According to Jacobs, the freedpeople discussed the issue “sensibly” and then voted “parliamentary style,” to have African American teachers manage the school.⁶⁴ She recounted this important democratic moment in her letter because it illustrated that formerly enslaved African Americans exercised democracy; it proved that they could and should be part of the nation as citizens because of their careful, sensible, and thoughtful decision-making. This decision by the freedpeople also pleased Jacobs for another reason: “The fact of their giving preference to colored teachers, as managers of the establishment, seemed to us to indicate that even their brief possession of freedom had begun to inspire them with respect for their race.”⁶⁵ Both Harriet and Louisa Jacobs wanted African Americans to shape their own lives and not rely on white Americans who often misunderstood them. In various letters exchanged with Lydia Maria Child and other northern abolitionists, what seemed to be most urgent for the Jacobses to depict was the agency and independence of freedpeople.

While Jacobs developed the curriculum for her school, which of course included her educational aims, her daughter, Louisa Jacobs, ran the day-to-day operations of the school. When the school opened its doors in January 1864, 75 scholars were enrolled but that number swelled to 225 a few months later.⁶⁶ In a letter to Lydia Maria Child, Louisa and Harriet Jacobs described their students as “fun and spirited,” acknowledging the fact that the dehumanizing institution of slavery had not “crushed them.”⁶⁷ Rather, Louisa dreamed of her students’ successes, and while looking around the room at these “little boys,” she “wonder[ed] whether there is not some Frederick Douglass among them, destined to do honor

to his race in the future.”⁶⁸ This reflection is interesting especially considering that white Americans, both in the North and South, unabashedly speculated as to whether fundamental differences in the intellectual capacities of African Americans and whites existed. In her letters, Louisa did not engage with this notion of fundamental intellectual differences, but she did admit to differences in temperament and her own students’ difficulty in “maintaining proper discipline.”⁶⁹ Nevertheless, she wrote, “we put heart, mind, and strength freely into the work, and only regret that we have not more physical strength.”⁷⁰ Unfortunately a few months later, Louisa’s health began to fail; she finished the school term, but gave up classroom teaching the following year. Instead she took responsibility for the Industrial Department, taught in the Sabbath school, and assisted her mother.⁷¹ A year later in November 1865, she and her mother established another school for freedpeople, the Lincoln School, in Savannah, Georgia, thus continuing their educational objectives.

Jacobs established an educational framework founded on the principles of activism, community, self-determination, and self-sufficiency. She believed that these principles would open the door for African Americans to American citizenship. In fact, *Incidents* ends not with marriage, which usually concluded the sentimental novel, but rather with her appreciation of her family, especially her grandmother and her uncle Philip who is called a “useful citizen” in his obituary.⁷² These “strange words” amazed her because they seemed to contradict the teachings of slavery, but clearly the post-Civil War era held much promise for her and other African American activists.⁷³ To publicize the abilities of freedpeople to become exemplary Americans, Harriet Jacobs arranged for a photograph to be taken of her

school. *The Freedmen's Record* described Jacobs as “irradiating” from the picture as she looked over her scholars; this image directly answered those “skeptical and superficial questions often put as to the desire and capacity of the negro race for improvement.”⁷⁴ Arguably, for Harriet and Louisa, the very idea of a formal educational institution existing for freedpeople was as a sign of a nation, at last, changing. “I am full of hope for the future. A Power mightier than man is guiding this revolution; and though justice moves slowly, it will come at last. The American people will outlive this mean prejudice against complexion,” they wrote.⁷⁵ African American leaders like Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet, and James McCune Smith visited the school, as did white abolitionists like Theodore Parker.⁷⁶ In his report on the school published in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, abolitionist Samuel J. May praised Jacobs as an “intelligent, judicious, invaluable” friend.⁷⁷ In the *Liberator*, William C. Nell used Harriet and Louisa as examples to strengthen his argument that freedpeople merited full citizenship.⁷⁸

Part of Jacobs’ motivation to educate African Americans came from her twofold aim to dismantle the argument for slavery claiming African Americans as incapable of education and to empower former African American slaves by equipping them with the necessary tools to navigate postbellum United States. The everyday activities of Jacobs, her family, and the African American community spoke to these aims. Throughout *Incidents*, Jacobs embodied a unique abolitionist spirit from girlhood to womanhood, from slavery to freedom. Her life’s work was to make African American people visible. She charted education as a viable objective and she carved out a space for African Americans that did not deny their experience, their voice, or their humanity but instead envisioned them as citizens of the nation. Her approach to education evolved from the moment that her mistress taught her to read and write—being literate—to the

opening of the Jacobs Free School—being an educator. Harriet Jacobs was a pioneer, not only for her activism as an abolitionist, but also, because of her educational aims, an incredible force that helped to shape post-Civil War life in America.

Notes

- 1 Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* [1861], in *The Classic Slave Narratives*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: New American Library, 2002), 522. All further references to this narrative will be shortened to *Incidents* and will be cited in notes.
- 2 Heather Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 7 and Janet D. Cornelius, *When I Can Read My Title Clear: Illiteracy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 32-33.
- 3 Jacobs, *Incidents*, 523.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 440.
- 5 In 1852, her friend, abolitionist and women's rights activist, Amy Post, encouraged her to write her life story.
- 6 Harriet Jacobs to Amy Post, June 21, 1857.
- 7 Though rare, some slaves did attend school. See, for instance, Janet D. Cornelius, *When I Can Read My Title Clear: Illiteracy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 59-84.
- 8 Thomas L. Webber, *Deep Like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter Community* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 27.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 156.
- 10 Jacobs, *Incidents*, 451. (Emphasis mine)
- 11 *Ibid.*, 440.
- 12 Jean Fagan Yellin, Harriet Jacob's biographer, has made very valuable contributions to the study of Harriet Jacob's life. In this article, I build on Yellin's work by making extensive use of her edited collection, *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, and her biography on Jacobs, *Harriet Jacobs: A Life*.
- 13 See, for instance, George Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1987) and Heather Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

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- 14 Jacobs, *Incidents*, 460.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Martha Jones, *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 126.
- 17 The full title was *The Deeper Wrong: Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.
- 18 Jacobs, *Incidents*, 511.
- 19 Ibid., 513.
- 20 Jacqueline Goldsby, "‘I Disguised My Hand’: Writing Versions of the Truth in Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," in *Harriet Jacobs and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: New Critical Essays*, ed. Deborah M. Garfield and Rafia Zafar (New York: Cambridge University Press), 19.
- 21 Jacobs, *Incidents*, 442.
- 22 Ibid., 449.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 30th Anniversary Edition (New York: Continuum, 2000), 54.
- 25 Gayle Tate, *Unknown Tongues: Black Women’s Political Activism in the Antebellum Era, 1830- 1860* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2003), 32.
- 26 Jacobs, *Incidents*, 523. Here Jacobs hints at this notion of retributive justice, which can be found in various speeches and texts of African American abolitionists from Bishop Richard Allen to Frederick Douglass.
- 27 Ibid., 522.
- 28 Fergus Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the War for the soul of America* (New York: Harper Collins: 2005), 113.
- 29 Jacobs, *Incidents*, 655.
- 30 For Jacobs, slavery necessitated trickery, which was a form of resistance, and she did not hesitate to use it as a weapon to defeat her owner.
- 31 Jacobs, *Incidents*, 655.
- 32 Ibid., 599.
- 33 For example, her narrative did not end with marriage, but freedom, which underscored her condemnation of slavery.
- 34 Jacobs, *Incidents*, 440.

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- 35 Ibid., 441-442.
- 36 Jean Fagan Yellin, ed., *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 171.
- 37 Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass: His Early Life as a Slave, His Escape from Bondage, and His Complete History to the Present Time*, ed. Rayford W. Logan (New York: Dover Publications, 2003), vii.
- 38 "To the Females of Colour," *The Weekly Advocate*, January 7, 1837.
- 39 Julie Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina, 1998), 64.
- 40 Ibid., 109.
- 41 Jean Fagan Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs: A Life* (Cambridge: Basic Books, 2004), 70.
- 42 McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 17.
- 43 Ibid., 142.
- 44 Jacobs, *Incidents*, 650.
- 45 Maria Stewart, "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality, The Sure Foundation on Which We Must Build [8 October 1831]," in Marilyn Richardson, ed., *Maria Stewart: America's First Black Woman Political Writer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 35.
- 46 Jacobs, *Incidents*, 647.
- 47 Ibid., 627.
- 48 Ibid., 643.
- 49 Deborah Gray White, *Arn't I A Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985), 61.
- 50 Jacobs, *Incidents*, 646.
- 51 Ibid., 646.
- 52 Amos Delos Gridley, *History of the Town of Kirkland, New York*, (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1874), 141.
- 53 Jacobs, *Incidents*, 645.
- 54 Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism*, 128.
- 55 Jones, *All Bound Up Together*, 125.
- 56 Yellin, *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, 509.
- 57 Ibid., 398.

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- 58 Letter from Charlotte Forten to William Lloyd Garrison, 20 November 1862, in Dorothy Sterling, ed., *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), 280.
- 59 Harriet Jacobs and Louisa Matilda Jacobs to Lydia Maria Child, 26 March 1864, in Jean Fagan Yellin, ed., *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, 559.
- 60 Williams, *Self-Taught*, 83-84.
- 61 Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs: A Life*, 178.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Letter from Harriet Jacobs, quoted in "Report of Friends' Association for the Aid and Elevation of Freedmen," 22 March 1864, in Jean Fagan Yellin, ed., *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, 556. For a list of these ten schools, see Jean Fagan Yellin, ed., *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, 557.
- 64 Harriet Jacobs and Louisa Matilda Jacobs to Lydia Maria Child, 26 March 1864, in Jean Fagan Yellin, ed., *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, 559.
- 65 Ibid., 559.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Ibid., 560.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Letter from Louisa Matilda Jacobs, quoted in the *Third Report of a Committee of the Representatives of New York Yearly Meeting of Friends Upon the Condition and Wants of the Colored Refugees*, 14 May 1864, in *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin, 566.
- 70 Harriet Jacobs and Louisa Matilda Jacobs to Lydia Maria Child, 26 March 1864, in Jean Fagan Yellin, ed., *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, 560.
- 71 Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs: A Life*, 179.
- 72 Jacobs, *Incidents*, 664.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs: A Life*, 185. To view this photo, "Coloured School at Alexandria Va 1864 Taught by Harriet Jacobs & daughter agents of New York Friends," see Jean Fagan Yellin, ed., *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, 640.
- 75 Ibid., 175.
- 76 Ibid., 184.
- 77 Ibid., 183.
- 78 Ibid., 184.

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George S. Schuyler, *Black and Conservative*

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When George S. Schuyler published his autobiography *Black and Conservative* in 1966, its title was intended to be paradoxical, underscoring how the two adjectives were rarely used together, particularly in an era that had recently seen the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965. When it came to political affiliation, the general assumption was that African Americans, more or less by definition, were not likely to be conservatives; rather, conservatism meant a desire to preserve the pre-existing status quo, making very little sense in Civil Rights era for a majority of African Americans to take a conservative stance.

Many assumptions were and continue to be made about race, nationality or gender, but the idea that African Americans were not considered political conservatives perhaps irritated Schuyler more than any. He resented the assumption on the part of white Americans that, because he was black, he was not politically sophisticated, had

particular interests, and, most of all, that he was a liberal, thus foisting upon him the essentialist notion that race determines politics. To Schuyler, this was the equivalent of being told how to think. In addition, as his career as a journalist and novelist developed, he increasingly adopted political views that could be characterized as right of center, a fact more than partially motivated by the desire to shock expectations. As an exception to the racial rule, Schuyler not only gained mainstream acceptance, but also the approval of renowned journalist, H. L. Mencken, whose attention he especially craved. Both Schuyler's life and work ultimately became a fascinating blurring of the authentic and the fabricated, symbolizing, in turn, his dissatisfaction with both sides of the "color line." Indeed, he underwent a very public struggle to create a self that resisted both public and private assumptions. This essay explores this dissatisfaction and struggle, focusing on two factors that were emblematic of both Schuyler's public and private lives: his satirical novel *Black No More* and the raising of his biracial daughter Philippa. Ultimately, Schuyler's story represents a member of an ethnic minority's siren song to conservative extremism and the self-destructiveness that came with it.

Schuyler was born in 1895 and raised in Syracuse, NY by a family that "boasted of having been free as far back as any of them could or wanted to remember, and they haughtily looked down upon those who had been in servitude... Such prejudices did not die out until after World War I" (*Black and Conservative* 4). His mother regarded the southern black families who had recently moved to their block as "uncouth" and associated with white Yankee families, who she described as "her kind of people" (12). He attended school as part of a tiny minority population that was "so fragmented by class divisions that any group unity was out of the question" (29), making joining the Army the only way out and upward for Schuyler.

After service in World War I (during which he did not see combat), Schuyler found himself in Harlem, a member of the Socialist party because, in his own words, they were “[t]he most active group around town, intellectually” (113). This was perfect for the young Schuyler who was longing to discuss the most pressing political issues of the day with others. As he wrote in his biography: “I had always thought dangerously, believing there should be no limit to thought” (97). Through his party connections he became assistant editor of the *Messenger*, for which he also wrote a satirical column he described as “quite iconoclastic.” Later, in 1924, he became the New York correspondent for the *Pittsburgh Courier*. By this time, Schuyler begun to “sense the proportions of what seemed [to him] to be a conspiracy to plant collectivism in America” (150). His fledgling socialism was giving way to what would soon be a fervent anticommunism, a position he took for the rest of his life.

An aversion to collectivism was a natural impulse for a man who, from the beginning of his career, took pride in bucking trends and stressed individualism. Describing his background, Schuyler wrote: “The old Northern Negro families had the habits, traits, and outlook of the whites for whom they worked and whose prejudices they shared” (4). Ironically, this claim described Schuyler himself more accurately than he was willing to recognize. One of the prejudices in question was against, as Schuyler’s mother often voiced, uneducated Southern black migrants who moved to the north and became ardent Democrats in the process. Like so many African Americans in the North of this period, Schuyler had internalized the idea held by both the American mainstream and his own family that African American folk culture, which had migrated up north, was culturally unsophisticated to the point of primitivism. Schuyler, therefore, resented the notion that he shared anything in common with this culture, including a compulsory political orientation. It is no surprise then that in the 1920s he also resented those writers and

artists of the Harlem Renaissance who celebrated African American folk culture and its left-leaning political views. It was Schuyler himself who penned the infamous article in the *Nation* entitled “The Negro-Art Hokum” wherein he claimed the reason African Americans were not congenitally disposed to produce inferior art forms was because “the Aframerican is merely a lampblack Anglo-Saxon [sic]” (97); as simply Anglo-Saxons with darker skin, he argued, African Americans did not actually have a distinctive culture different from that of mainstream American culture. Not surprising, Schuyler’s conclusion was not shared by many other African American writers of his time and it was in response to this article that Langston Hughes wrote his famous essay “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain.”

Significantly, Schuyler had solid credentials in the African American literary world: he had been the roommate of Wallace Thurman (where both lived in the rooming house dubbed “Niggerati Manor” in Thurman’s *Infants of the Spring*), had praised some of Hughes’s writing (despite the aforementioned critical essay), and had been complimentary about W.E. B. DuBois’s novel *Dark Princess*. But in an effort to stress his independent thinking and escape “minority” classification, he also separated himself from the leading African American writers of the day, most notably, by lampooning many of them—notably DuBois—in his novel *Black No More* and earlier works of fiction, and criticizing their political views in his many essays. It was thus a comparatively short step from this to Schuyler becoming the conservative voice of the African American *Courier* distinguishing himself enough from his peers to attract the notice and admiration of conservative members of the white literary establishment, such as H. L. Mencken; in fact, for a while, Schuyler was referred to as “the black Mencken,” in a nod to the journalist’s cutting satirical style which Schuyler employed in his own writings, a compliment that nevertheless consigned him to a literary sub-category.

Schuyler's determination to construct himself as an anti-stereotype of the unsophisticated black American continually illustrated the extent to which he had internalized the values of white America in his own quest to assert his value as a black American, often leading to some stereotypical and reductive thinking of his own: his notion of the "Aframerican" as simply a "lampblack Anglo-Saxon" is very similar to Huck's verdict of Jim in *Huckleberry Finn*, specifically when Huck proclaims of Jim: "I knowed he was white inside" (Twain 251). The difference, of course, was that Twain was being deliberately ironic. But the misguided notion that a superior kind of African American could emerge by overcoming his or her so-called blackness to reveal an interior made up of desirable white qualities was all the more marked in Schuyler's thinking during these years, particularly in how he raised his daughter, Philippa.

He had married Josephine Cogdell, a white woman, who in 1931 gave birth to Philippa, an occasion reported in all the African American newspapers. Soon, Philippa made many appearances in the press when she was deemed to be a musical and intellectual prodigy, and much later the subject of her own biography. Josephine attributed her daughter's genius to a raw food diet and, more importantly, miscegenation, which Josephine believed was source of "hybrid energy." She and George began entering their daughter in every available music contest, generally making a spectacle of her. In one of Josephine's notes about these contests, quoted in Philippa's biography, she illustrates that Schuyler had found a partner who shared in his deliberately iconoclastic outlook: "[B]ecause we have refused to be conventional in our way of life, opportunity will not come to us unsought. We must seek the best for you, go out and get it or it will pass us by. We, and especially you, are a challenge to the set notions of America on race. ... Only genius will break them down, and that you have. So I take you about as much for the education of America as

for the education of Philippa” (qtd. in Talalay 53). While Josephine was using their daughter as an educational tool, Schuyler was using his press connections to get her coverage in mainstream publications such as *Time* and *Look*; the fact that she turned out to be a beauty made his task that much easier.

Despite all her gifts, however, Philippa was not a happy child and as an adult was prone to depression. She was acutely conscious from an early age of the extent to which she was being manipulated and displayed, in her words, as a “puppet,” and thus never allowed to think of herself beyond racial terms. Her biographer says, “Philippa’s primary identification was largely with the white world, even when it reached her via the black intelligentsia. Her precocity was fed on notions and conceits of the white milieu” (Talalay 94), and as part of this process she had absorbed and endorsed her father’s conservatism. As a young adult Philippa lived, for the most part, overseas trying on different racial identities. Though she was largely influenced by the white world, her celebrity had been as an African American prodigy, and while she felt tied to both worlds, she discovered that abroad she was often perceived as being what today would be recognized as something closer to Latina or Asian: “A significant number of people had told her... that she did not look Negro at all but rather southern European, Levantine, Indian, or Oriental” (222). She found that this racial ambiguity gave her a sense of freedom she could not find in segregated America, which she largely abandoned for Europe in order to pursue her career. She later wrote: “I encountered vicious barriers of prejudice in the field of employment [in the U.S.] because I was the off-spring of what America calls a ‘mixed marriage’ . . . But instead of breaking under the strain, I adjusted to it. I left” (qtd. in Talalay 112).

She obtained a new passport, and for a while “passed” in Europe under the name Felipa Monterro y Schuyler, suggesting a Latin heritage. When her father wrote

an essay about her for his (never-published) book *The Negro in America*, she furiously wrote from Europe to her mother claiming, “I am not a Negro, and won’t stand for being called one in a book that will circulate in countries where that taint has not been applied to me. It makes all future effort on my part to forge a worthwhile niche for myself in society where I will be accepted as a person not a strange curiosity useless” (qtd. in Talalay 224). Because she could fit into almost any ethnic category in Europe, she chose to be accepted on her merits as a musician and a woman, not as a “curiosity” or token as she found in America. Schuyler’s own contrarianism in matters of race exacerbated her discomfort and ultimately undermined their relationship, as her father went much further in political terms than Philippa was prepared to go. As the century wore on, he spoke out against the Civil Rights movement, against Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and against African independence, all of which Schuyler regarded as nothing more than communist conspiracies. As Philippa noted: “My father’s way-out extreme right conservatism has been an extra factor in segregating me. For some reason, he has chosen to be politically on the same side of the fence as the most prejudicial whites [in America]” (qtd. in Talalay 262).

Schuyler’s willingness to adopt any perspective other than that expected of him, and to prove his daughter not to be what was expected of her, shows the extent to which he had turned the definition of *conservative* inside out, arguing both against the status quo (wanting respect as a black American) and against changing it (wanting respect as a quasi-white American). It is a reminder of how bound up in the meaning of the word *politic* is the word *expedient*; Schuyler found himself in the same position as many minorities that preceded him but was willing to take the most expedient road to racial advancement—even if it meant having to consort with the enemy. As his life and career progressed, it appears that Schuyler

never recognized his political contradictions, even if his daughter, whose advancement he tried so elaborately to orchestrate, eventually did. Soon after Schuyler had published an article blaming the Watts riots on Dr. King “infecting the mentally retarded with the germs of civil disobedience” [qtd. in Williams 171]), *The Crisis* wrote: “Mr. Schuyler does not even comprehend the depth and fury of the Negro’s resentment against the restrictions imposed upon him solely because of his race. All in his years [sic], Mr. Schuyler has been too busy breaking idols to learn this lesson” (qtd. in Williams 171). Yet it was not so much that Schuyler did not comprehend things as much as he repressed such comprehension, deliberately focusing on issues elsewhere when it was to his advantage. He had suffered from Jim Crow like everybody else, and knew exactly how it felt, but he also knew—he thought—a way out of it: the most expedient, if not the most consistent, way.

The satirical novel for which he is best known, *Black No More* (1931), is a story that deals with the issue of pure opportunism, racial and otherwise, and as such, it is difficult to pin down its politics, more evidence, it could be argued, of Schuyler’s own conflicted thinking. The plot revolves around the discovery of a technique to turn black skin white through the escapades of Max Disher, a black American who becomes Matthew Fisher, a white American, after being told one night by a beautiful white girl in a Harlem club, “I never dance with niggers!” (8). Disher’s decision to take a color-changing treatment is purely for self-interest; it has less to do with ideology than with satisfying his lust. He goes home and dreams of “sitting beside her on a golden throne [presumably sharing her white attributes] while millions of manacled white slaves prostrated themselves before him” (9). But then, curiously, Disher has a nightmare about a lynching. It seems very simple to him: who would not want to be white under such circumstances? The white scenario appears to be clearly a positive one, where power

is conferred and ultimate power is possible, so Disher naturally rejects blackness and becomes white (and then, contrary to most stereotypes, he is able to dance).

Although Disher immediately takes the “Black No More” treatment and the rest of the story is told from his transformed perspective, it is not easy to discern Schuyler’s attitude toward his protagonist. Ostensibly the hero, by the fourth line of the story, Disher’s features are nevertheless described as having “a slightly satanic cast” (3) and, as quoted above from the first chapter, he fantasizes about slaves—in this case, white ones. Max’s fantasy of white slaves suggests that the world he is trying to join would simply be an inverted version of the world he currently inhabits, so that (although he never consciously thinks of it this way) one side of the color line remains a negative reflection of the other. Moreover, other aspects of the narrative suggest an even more unstable and incoherent racial perspective. The world of Black Harlem, for example, is one that Max finds more valuable and authentic than that of white society where “joy and abandon... was obviously forced” (22). Yet, it is the latter world that Disher is intent on joining. Ultimately, the protagonist is actually rewarded by his black author for becoming white by achieving the girl of his dreams. As a whole, the narrative, in terms of its racial perspective, is inconsistent and illogical.

One might forgive the narrative’s illogical inconsistencies due to the fact that the text is formally presented as satire, but satire too requires a stable viewpoint from which to make certain arguments. One example of a narrative wherein the attitude appears to shift is when Max, or Matthew, as he has since become, realizes that since everybody has become white, the easiest way to cash in is to become a leader of the white supremacist group, the Knights of Nordica. Despite his loathing of the “white masses” he was originally so eager to join, this decision makes satirical sense since he plans to “use them as a stepladder to the real money” (49). At

the end of the story, the entire issue of race discrimination is reversed as statistics are published that argue that the whiter a person's skin, the more likely that he or she was once originally black; in fact, as it turns out, all the Nordica leadership is revealed as having some African ancestry. Disher consequently flees the country with the rest of the Nordica leadership. In their departure, his old friend Bunny brings along his new and authentically black wife: "She must be the last black gal in the country," Matthew remarked, glancing enviously at his friend. ... "She's a race patriot," Bunny responds (156). Matthew's bewildered response nevertheless reveals a simultaneous envy of his friend, who ultimately resists "Black No More." In Schuyler's novel, race pride mingles with race rejection in much the same way that prominent African American leaders are lampooned in the book along with organizations like the NAACP. The last "set piece" in the book is a savage satire of a lynching, whose brutality and savagery, even as a subject for "black" humor, in 1931 was a risky and perilous strategy for a writer to take. Its inclusion, however, illustrates perfectly Schuyler's desire to both castigate extreme behavior by some white Americans while simultaneously mocking the extremes of race pride among black Americans. In the scene, white characters are lynched because they are so white that nobody believes they were not originally black, and, in fact, they do have distant African American ancestry. Thus, ironically, apparent whites lynch other apparent whites for being black. The ludicrousness of the situation underscores Schuyler's point, which he aims at both races: racial discrimination of all kinds is senseless; and, as a corollary, from Schuyler's perspective, so are the virtues of miscegenation. At the end of *Black No More*, he writes: "Everybody that was anybody had a stained skin... America was definitely, enthusiastically mulatto-minded" (179). Even this, however, is a sardonic point as the book ends when a character spots a photograph of Max and his extended family in the newspaper, all now

looking notably “dusky” (180). Color is therefore remains a cause for discrimination, except now it is fashionable to be dark, and Max has once again cashed in on the winning side.

Max, the supreme opportunist whose feelings about his own race, and race as a concept, virtually changes on every page, and as such, is an apt reflection, at least partly, of his creator’s psyche—as was the daughter he raised to benefit from both aspects of her mixed racial background. Schuyler knew what it was to be pigeonholed and did everything in his power to escape it. As the historian John Henrik Clarke writes, “George got up in the morning, waited to see which way the world was turning, then struck out in the opposite direction. He was a rebel who enjoyed playing that role” (qtd. in *BNM* vii). This made Schuyler, paradoxically, a non-conservative conservative—one who “played” the conservative role then eventually came to believe in its ideology to the point of extremism, out of expediency. Schuyler deconstructs the whole conservative narrative without supplying a constructive alternative, other than his anti-communism; his message was largely about what he did *not* want to be, either personally or professionally. He eventually drifted out of the mainstream, out of his job at the *Courier*, and into the arms of white ultraconservative organizations such as the John Birch Society, never achieving the broad success his considerable talents promised. His private life fared no better: Philippa died at age 35 in a plane crash in Vietnam, where she was working as a journalist, and his wife Josephine hung herself two years later—Schuyler outlived her by eight years.

The ultimate irony of George S. Schuyler is that, when it came to matters of racial categorization, he was, in many respects, correct. On the last page of his autobiography, he writes that, “At best, race is a superstition” (352). His was an early and often lonely fighter against essentialism, against outdated and untenable notions of race as perceived by both sides of the “color line.” Hence, he was

not surprised at the difficulty with which black Americans overcame preconceptions, as he probably would not have been surprised that an African American candidate for office could one day be described as “not black enough.” Yet his story also illustrates the tragic consequences that only an intense awareness of double consciousness could produce. As Oscar R. Williams has said, “Schuyler constantly warred with his twoness, struggling to be part of the American mainstream while trying to resist the call of his African American contemporaries to join the struggle. In the end, Schuyler chose to be American, sacrificing his identity and, eventually, his family” (174). Of course, the whole point is that he *was* an American—but in claiming this identity, he felt he had to deny any specific racial solidarity, causing him to be regarded by many of his fellow African Americans as a traitor.

It is difficult to understand how an African American like Schuyler, who had grown up in the Jim Crow era, could be persuaded, or rather persuade himself, that the Civil Rights movement had actually made conditions worse for minority Americans. But his story makes it all too clear how vulnerable such embattled Americans could be to the lure of extreme conservatism. Ultimately, his attraction was not to an ideology per se, which had to be considerably distorted if it was to fit a decidedly minority viewpoint, but to the promise of individualist conservatism preached. This is why his story remains pertinent, both as a warning against such vulnerability, and also against the counter-productiveness of stereotyping, political and otherwise.

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***Nisei* Politics of Identity and American Popular Music in the 1930s and 1940s**

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Growing nationalist thinking and anti-immigration legislation in American politics today calls for a critical historicizing of the continuing ambiguities of U.S. citizenry and notions of what it is to be an American. The identity crisis of *Nisei*—second generation Japanese Americans—resulted from the complex intersection of America’s racialized ideology toward immigrants, California’s virulent anti-Asian agitation, and the economic and political power struggles between the United States and Japan in gaining dominance of the Pacific region.

For many *Nisei* music served to reinforce their American identity during the tense years leading up to World War II. Swing music, popular music of the day, sparked a dance craze during the 1930s and 1940s among young Americans. Because *Nisei* were coming of age during this period, I chose to study the influence of popular music on the formation of their identity. Interviews with West Coast *Nisei* about the role of music in their lives serve to test my premise.

George Yoshida's book, *Reminiscing in Swingtime: Japanese Americans in American Popular Music (1925-1960)*, prompted this research. It is invaluable for analyzing the correlation between music and identity particularly of second generation Japanese Americans. In this study, I juxtapose the identity of Nisei as Americans born in the U.S. with the politics of prejudice that prevented this population from being socially accepted and exercising their political rights.

I address the formation of Nisei identity within the context of their rejection as citizens and the discriminatory injustices they endured. The particular sociopolitical circumstances Nisei faced elucidate how identities are created and manipulated to justify the treatment of citizens considered inassimilable and considered a threat in times of political conflict and impending war.

Development of the Nisei's identity demonstrates the impact of the social and political conditions in which this generation matured, and the challenges they faced in asserting that they were Americans. Highlighted is the importance of culture in evolving identities and the politics surrounding them. This politics of identity is a precursor to identity politics, a field of inquiry that emerged in the social revolution of the 1960s.¹ A politics of identity stands apart from identity politics in that it does not emphasize *difference* as leverage for empowering identities, but instead stresses the goal of *commonality* in the desire to participate in U.S. national culture. Posing the questions "What historical and social forces from the 1900s to the 1940s shaped Nisei identity?" and "How did music serve as an expression of the Nisei's Americanness?" is meant to stir a discussion of the racial ideology inherent in American life and how music connected Nisei to the nation and culture in which they sought acceptance.

The politics of identity frames the exigencies Nisei faced in attempting to assimilate into U.S. national culture and attain the rights of full citizenship prior to and during World War II. A politics of identity narrates Nisei experiences of racial discrimination and political exclusion from the 1920s on, climaxing in the internment of Japanese Americans primarily from the West Coast in the 1940s.

Cultural politics provides a useful framework for exploring the purpose of music in predominantly middle class Nisei life. Personal interviews with Nisei reveal whether American music, especially the dance band music of the 1930s and 1940s, was integral to the Americanization of Nisei or not. Lisa Lowe asserts that national culture is the arena in which an individual politically evolves into an American citizen: "It is through culture that the subject becomes, acts, and speaks itself as "American." (1990: 2-3). Although citizenship is commonly equated with meeting official requirements and laws, a fuller interpretation of American citizenship takes into account a certain ethos created by not only history, narratives, and events, but by language, customs, celebrations, and forms of artistic expression that contribute to the social and political fabric of this country. Culture is the means by which one personally identifies and establishes a relationship to the national collective. Stuart Hall talks about cultural identities as "not an essence, but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position." (Hall 1990: 226). In positioning themselves as Americans, Nisei became embroiled in a politics of identity that is historically based, involving how the United States viewed itself economically and politically as a nation and as an evolving world power.

The Nisei's search for an identity presents a complex and fluid process that involved not only the external racial predicament this generation faced, but also internal pressures they experienced within their communities. Forming an identity required a negotiation

of their ethnic heritage, generation, occupation, and residential location in their desire to prove themselves American. Lon Kurashige in his book, *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict: A History of Ethnic Identity and Festival in Los Angeles, 1934-1990*, relates how Nisei sought to “smash” the stereotypes and perceptions white America had of them and dispel the widespread view of the role Japanese tradition and customs had in their daily life. By aligning themselves with the social practices and hierarchies in American society, they adopted the notions “that men and masculinity were privileged over women and femininity; middle-class lifestyles and sensibilities were valued over those of the subordinate classes; and faith in the fairness of the American government.” Such ideas resonated with the Nisei’s Japanese patriarchal upbringing and familiarity with class hierarchies (Kurashige 2002: 6). Japanese in America also drew on the social sensitivity of their cultural heritage—the ability to adapt and assume the attitudes and behavior of the host society in facilitating their acculturation (Fugita and O’Brien 1991: 94).

Nisei Subculture

The Japanese immigration pattern in the U.S. delineates three distinct generations as a result of the National Origins Act of 1924, which cut off further entry of this population until the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. The well-defined generations of Japanese Americans include *Issei* (‘first generation’)—immigrants who arrived on American shores between 1885 and 1924; *Nisei* (‘second generation’)—Issei’s offspring; and *Sansei* (‘third generation’) - the children of Nisei. Fourth and fifth generations succeed the third generation Sansei, many of them racially and ethnically mixed as Japanese Americans continue to marry outside their ethnic group.

The first generation to be born on American soil, but considered the second generation to have settled in the U.S., the *Nisei* embodied the hope of their Japanese

immigrant parents in fulfilling the American dream of economic opportunity and political legitimacy. Born between 1910 and 1940, by 1920 Nisei comprised nearly twenty-seven percent (29,672) of the total Japanese American population of 111,055. In 1930 their numbers jumped to around forty-nine percent (68,357) of the total population and in 1940, close to sixty-three percent (79,642) of all Japanese Americans in the contiguous fifty states (Daniels 1988: 156).

A majority of Japanese Americans settled on the West Coast, the primary entry point for Asian immigrants coming to the U.S. In 1920, around sixty-six percent of the 111,055 total population lived in California. By 1940, when the total population increased to 126,947, the number of Japanese Americans in California expanded to seventy-five percent (73,296) of that total. Of the remaining population, fifteen percent settled in Washington and Oregon and only ten percent resided in Colorado, Utah, Idaho, or New York (Daniels 1988:156). Because of the high concentration of Japanese Americans residing in California much of the discussion here centers on the Golden State. Additional research is needed to accurately portray Japanese Americans elsewhere.

The Nisei were not a homogeneous group and instead represented a spectrum of identities. This generation comprise two basic subgroups: those who were born and raised in the U.S. and *Kibei*, Nisei born here but sent to Japan by their families for three or more years of education before returning (Hosokawa 1969: 296). Central to this study are the U.S. bred Nisei (87.5% majority), since it is their Americanization in which the impact of American music will be viewed. Nisei identities also varied according to whether individuals lived in rural areas or urban centers. Those living in rural areas led more provincial lives in isolated farm communities, while Nisei urbanites had broader social experiences and tended to be more cosmopolitan.

Nisei often lived in Japanese enclaves in both rural and urban areas with their Issei parents. While socially interacting with other Americans in public schools through to high school, once Nisei enrolled in college, social segregation was more marked.

Occupationally, most relied on Issei enterprises in Japanese enclaves, which formed in response to the inhospitable environment of the West Coast states. Nisei found employment as commercial fishermen, retail managers, wholesale managers, sales clerks, craftsmen, chauffeurs, domestic service workers, truck farmers, farm laborers, contract gardeners, and nursery operators and laborers (Kurashige 2002: 29). Many felt confined to their communities and could do little since positions in engineering, manufacturing, or education were closed to them and many businesses either had policies against their employment, or bowed to employees who refused to work alongside people of Japanese descent.

Although Nisei were economically middle class, they were socially and politically disenfranchised, making it difficult for them to mobilize in their quest for equality. Those who practiced law, medicine, or owned large retail businesses in the ethnic economy were of upper middle class status. Nisei proprietors of small retail businesses or wholesale produce operations fell centrally within the middle class. Others employed in domestic service, contract gardening, sales, farming, and other manual service work occupied the lower end.

Enemies in Their Own Land

Prior to World War II, white racism subordinated the West Coast Nisei in every aspect of their lives. Politically, they were denied full rights as citizens; economically, discrimination severely minimized their occupational opportunities; socially, they were ostracized and unwelcome in certain neighborhoods, public facilities, and social institutions; and racially, they were viewed as “base, inassimilable, and objectionable” (Ichioka 2006: 118).

Politically, as legal citizens of the U.S., Nisei theoretically had an advantage over their parents who were regarded as aliens ineligible for citizenship. But the prevailing racial prejudice accompanied by prohibitive state and federal legislation severely limited economic and social opportunities for them. The anti-Japanese sentiment leveled at Nisei, historically, had its beginnings in the anti-Asian agitation against the Chinese, starting in the 1850s. Organized labor, economically motivated to eliminate competition for jobs with Chinese workers, cultivated anti-Asian attitudes in California state politics. They led the first two decades of anti-Japanese agitation when Japanese immigrants increased in number around the turn of the century. Their agitation made inevitable the federal immigration law of 1924 that prohibited further emigration of Japanese laborers.

Orientalism, a concept of “otherness” applied to people of Asian descent, is the underlying discourse that scarred the formation of a Nisei identity. An idea rooted in the European Enlightenment, orientalism reinforced the dichotomy of submission and dominance; the submission of Asian peoples by dominant European powers² (Tchen 1994: 15). The ideological concept of nationality in the United States, based on Protestantism and an Anglo-Saxon heritage, shaped the idea of otherness referred to as American Orientalism.³ This form of Orientalism contributed to the social construction of a pejorative racial identity of Asians in this country and it explains the deep-seated prejudices toward and profiling of Asian immigrants even today.

Historically, ties between the U.S. and Asian countries have always been problematic. Causes for the uneasy relationship are the orientalist racializations of Asian countries as alien and barbarous; the perceived threat of Asian immigrant laborers as the “yellow peril” in supplanting white European immigrants; and the conception that Asians are physically and intellectually different, with a subtext of being inferior, and therefore inassimilable. (Lowe 1996: 4).

What has negated Asian American assimilation into the national culture is the history of labor exploitation of this population within the economic sphere of American capitalism and U.S. victories in three wars in Asia in the twentieth century—the Philippines, Japan, and Korea. These developments contributed to the schizophrenic stance of the U.S. which excluded Asians for citizenship in order to maintain the Anglo-Saxon or Nordic national identity while keeping an open door to East Asian countries to ensure economic access and growth (Lowe 1996: 20).

Fanning the flames of discrimination and inequality were the perceived threat of Asian states as rivals both economically and militarily. Economic forces emerging in Asia challenged European and American dominance in the global economy from the nineteenth century. In his book *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier*, David Palumbo-Liu echoes how the emergence of the U.S. as a modern nation is intertwined with Asia in the politics of a “new global political economy” in the 1930s. He talks in detail about the fear of White America toward contact and intermixing with “racial minorities, the poor, and immigrants” in the early twentieth century (1999, 17, 26). This fear focused on Asian immigrants as the U.S. pushed to politically and economically expand and control the Pacific region. Psychological and scientific discourses addressed and fueled White America’s fear of the “Other.” Eugenics, in particular, argued for “exclusion, deportation, imprisonment, commitment to insane asylums, anti-miscegenation laws, and forced sterilization” in reforming who could become an American⁴. Eugenacists set the standard in using race as an argument against immigration and played a central role in passing the anti-immigration National Origins Act of 1924. This act reinforced racialized notions of citizenship and nationality that accompanied U.S. social and economic interests⁵.

Further complicating the United States relationship with Asia was Japan’s imperialistic intentions overseas in

their search for territory and natural resources. Japan's invasion and conquest of Manchuria in 1931 and Nanking (capitol of Nationalist China) in 1937, created political and economic tension both in the U.S. and globally. The economic and military pressures affecting the U.S. created an inhospitable political culture for Asian immigrant laborers in the national economy, despite their necessity for economic growth. This ambivalence converged with political and legal views of Asians as culturally and racially "other," resulting in being ineligible for citizenship (Lowe 1996: 5).

Carey McWilliams⁶ in his book, *Prejudice. Japanese-Americans: Symbol of Racial Intolerance*, describes the "undeclared war" between California and Japan between the years 1900 and 1941 (1944: 15). He frames the conflict as a transpacific struggle between Japan and the U.S. for political and economic dominance. First and second generation Japanese Americans were victimized in the push for white supremacy in California and Japanese supremacy in the Pacific. White supremacist groups in California, such as the Sons of the Golden West, the State Federation of Labor, the California Grange, and the American Legion used anti-Japanese sentiment as a means to solidify and unite their membership around the single issue of a common enemy—the Japanese immigrant. The reactionary fear of people who were racially and culturally different manifested in the mantra of "Yellow Peril," cementing anti-Japanese feelings from 1909 on with this pejorative stereotype⁷ of Japanese immigrants (McWilliams 1944: 44). "Yellow Peril" embodied white people's fear that the influx of Asian immigrants signaled the beginning of an invading horde. For over forty years, the continual opposition to Japanese in California created a firm ideological basis for anti-Japanese sentiment as it was applied to almost all political, social, and economic problems.

Discriminatory state policies economically and socially subordinated Japanese immigrants in California.

The Alien Land Acts in 1913 and 1920 in California, and similar statutes in twelve other states, prohibited first-generation Japanese immigrants from owning land due to their racialized status as “aliens ineligible for citizenship.” Industrious Issei and Nisei farmers proved capable of turning fallow fields into verdant farmland, creating unwanted competition for white farmers. Legislating the Alien Land Acts eliminated the competition by restricting Japanese land ownership and agricultural activity. Asian immigrants also endured segregation in the form of anti-miscegenation laws, such as Section 69 of the California Civil Code, finalized in 1880, forbidding Asians from marrying Caucasian partners. Such social segregation reinforced the untouchable status of Japanese immigrants.

Prejudicial treatment extended to education as well. In 1905 the San Francisco Board of Education proposed sending all Asian children to separate public schools; fortunately the proposal never passed. Asian children, however, in the following towns in Sacramento County—Florin, Isleton, Walnut Grove, and Courtland—were segregated and sent to separate public schools. Nisei students living in urban centers fared better, but their social opportunities were still clearly restricted.

In following the American dream of economic opportunity, some Nisei attended colleges and universities with great success. Many graduates, however, found it nearly impossible to obtain employment outside their ethnic communities. Many engineering, manufacturing, or business firms created regulations against employing Japanese Americans on the basis of race. Denial of their citizen’s rights and social ostracism, in general, made culture an important vehicle for Japanese Americans in strategizing new subjectivities and practices that countered their political, economic, and social marginalization (Lowe 1996: 22).

Nisei Tales

The following personal accounts of Nisei provide a needed perspective in surveying music's role in the Americanization of Nisei. I originally interviewed several Nisei for this study, but due to the length allowed for this article, I have included only three. It is my plan to interview more members of this generation to obtain a broader sampling of the role American popular music played for Nisei in their youth. The three Nisei presented here are from Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Wapato, Washington. They represent a range of Nisei life as experienced in two different urban centers and one isolated rural community. Other considerations for their choice included portraying individuals from varying socio-economic levels and gender perspectives.

The interviews gave me the opportunity to learn about my subjects' socialization and whether music, particularly American popular music, played any role in their lives. To these means I asked the following questions:

1. Where were you born and when? Did you grow up at this location? Describe your home life.
2. When you were growing up, was music a part of your life? Did you learn songs in school? What kinds of songs? What kind of music did you like? Who were your favorite artists? Did you sing or play an instrument? Did you sing or perform with a chorus, music ensemble or band of some kind? What meaning did music have in your life?
3. Was American popular music a part of your growing up? If so, what songs did you like? Which musicians or singers did you enjoy? Did you listen to and dance to the music of the big bands in the 1930s and 1940s? Which were your favorite bands? Which singers did you like? What radio shows did you listen to? Did you attend live music shows? Where and when?

4. If you listened to, danced to, or played American popular music, what meaning did it have for you? What did participating in this music mean for you? Did you ever consider this music to be part of your identity as an American? Do you feel that American popular music was a means for Nisei to express their Americanness, their participation in American mainstream life? If you agree, could you articulate how it expressed Nisei Americanness? If you don't agree, could you mention why not?

The advanced age of my interviewees gave this study a sense of urgency in documenting their stories of what it was like to be Japanese American in the 1930s and 1940s. Their narratives portrayed not only the hardships they faced, but also a certain indomitable spirit that enabled them to establish some sense of well-being.

Some of the interviewees now live in Massachusetts and attend the annual *O-shôgatsu* ['New Year's'] celebration in Lexington, Massachusetts organized by Japanese Americans in New England. I am grateful to them for sharing their personal, sometimes bitter, accounts. Their quickly dwindling numbers make their stories all the more precious.

George Yoshida

George Yoshida planted the seed for this study. In his book he states, "Popular American music was an essential, pervasive influence in the Americanization of Nisei." [1997: 126]. Yoshida, himself, is a product of this influence, so my interview with him is particularly valuable.⁸

Yoshida was born in Seattle, Washington and raised there until he was junior high school age before moving to Los Angeles. He stressed that his Americanization took place over time and through a broad range of activities and influences, such as the music he listened to, danced to, and played, the food he ate, the sports he

participated in, the games he enjoyed, and the role of Protestant churches in his East Los Angeles community. He remembered, “I brought salami or peanut butter and jelly sandwiches [to school] and learned to eat soup without slurping [considered acceptable in Japanese culture]. I was too embarrassed to bring Japanese rice balls for lunch. I also drank Coca-Cola.” Sports was another activity that became a symbol of Nisei Americanness for Yoshida who participated with other Nisei at the YMCA and at school. The churches also played a major part in the Americanization of both Nisei and their Issei parents. Yoshida recalled how “The use of English in hymn singing, Bible readings, and Sunday school, and the exposure to western harmonies and melodies in church music Americanized us.” This interviewee saw his Americanization as a broader process of enculturation into middle class American life.

Strongly identifying himself as American, he harbored a certain reticence toward Japanese culture while growing up: “I didn’t enjoy traditional Japanese music and Buddhism was alien to me, it was more cultural than religious.” As was the custom, however, he attended Japanese language school everyday after public school where, he remembered, “I learned reading and writing, Japanese songs, and also went to picnics called *undokai* where we exercised and played games and there was food.” His connection to Japanese culture was obligatory, but it did not influence or compromise the strong identification he had of being an American.

Yoshida came from a musical family, his mother played church music on organ and his father sang American songs. He described his musical beginnings while in elementary school in Seattle: “I joined the Harmonica Club that played mostly Stephen Foster songs, such as “Old Folks at Home” and “Swanee River.” Then around 1935 I heard Benny Goodman’s band on the radio for the first time along with Lionel Hampton, Teddy Wilson, and other

African American musicians. This music really appealed to me, and I started lessons on alto saxophone in junior high school.” In 1939 while he was in high school, he and his friends gathered to listen to the big band recordings of Artie Shaw and Benny Goodman, “I went to a friend’s garage with two other friends - me on sax, and the other two on piano and trumpet.” Yoshida continued, “We heard Artie Shaw play “Begin the Beguine”; I bought the record and arrangement and we tried to play it.” During this period Yoshida listened to a number of musicians, Duke Ellington, Tommy Dorsey, and singers Frank Sinatra, Billy Ekstine, who sang with the Earl Hines band, and Bob Eberle, a singer in Glenn Miller’s band. Yoshida’s saxophone playing days continued when he attended Los Angeles City College (LACC) and played in the school swing band. It was while attending LACC that he heard Duke Ellington’s band live performing “Do Nothing Till You Hear From Me” being the most memorable. In reference to black musicians, Yoshida mentioned, “Race records kept white bands and black bands segregated.” Although he was able to attend performances by black bands, the sustained segregation of race records generally resulted in the Nisei’s access and emulation of the music of white bands.⁹

Yoshida kept up his saxophone playing days while he was interned in Poston, Arizona from 1942 on. He performed as a member of the Poston camp dance band, the Music Makers. Dancing was an important part of camp life, “A lot of dances were organized by the social clubs and the Music Makers provided the music.” Yoshida reiterated the importance of music saying, “Big band was our [Nisei] music.” Yoshida’s participation in American popular music as both a musician and a jitterbug dancer reinforces this sentiment. This Nisei’s enthusiasm toward and ownership of American swing affirmed the importance of this music for his generation.

Yutaka Kobayashi

Yutaka Kobayashi is a native of San Francisco who grew up in Japan Town between Laguna and Sutter streets.¹⁰ The typical activities of an American teenager filled Yutaka Kobayashi's days during the 1930s and 40s. Quite athletic, he participated in sports: "Sports was a big part of my growing up. There were baseball teams, football teams, swimming, and track. I was on the track team and won my letter in track." He also enjoyed fishing and going to movies, "Movies were a big part of our lives because all we had were radios, no TV. The big thing for us were the Andy Hardy movies, featuring Mickey Rooney, Ann Rutherford, and Judy Garland, where they showed teenage parties and such. We all tried to emulate that; we had our parties. The series lasted four or five years; it captured everyday life. Everyone emulated the characters and lifestyle in these movies." Kobayashi's interests and activities reflected those of any young person growing up in a middle class American family.

The church in his community played an important role in Kobayashi's socialization: "My two older brothers and I were active in our various social clubs, including a church fellowship club, which was a big thing - Presbyterian - at Christ's Church on Post and Octavia. They held Sunday fellowship meetings with people in Berkeley and San Mateo. They also used to have so-called Christian conferences. Fellowship clubs served as a social outlet for Nisei." Annual Christian conferences offered opportunities to talk about social issues—international and evangelical—and included speakers as well as dinners and social dances. For Japanese Americans, churches were centers for not only social activities, but for employment and housing assistance as well.

The local YMCA also created social opportunities. Kobayashi attended the YMCA's annual New Year's Eve dances. The dances featured live music by local Nisei dance bands; there was one band in San Francisco that played at all the big events, but Kobayashi could

not recall its name. Other local Nisei social clubs also organized their own dances. “These dances were a big deal. Whenever there was a dance planned it took about a month ahead of time [to plan it]—Spring Dance, Halloween Dance, Thanksgiving Dance—whatever a social club could afford.” Kobayashi danced a lot and loved to jitterbug. To learn to jitterbug he explained, “One watched movies, practiced with a chair to learn jitterbug steps and moves. Jitterbug dancing involved a 6-beat dance rhythm in half time (2/4). American dance music was an integral part of our Americanization. When we became teenagers in high school, we always looked forward to that [social life] because of the restricted home life. We never invited girls to our house. We only socialized at church, school, or at clubs, that was it, or if you happened to meet in a store. Those were the only social outlets in terms of meeting the opposite sex as a teenager. You could hardly ever invite friends of the opposite sex to your house. You just didn’t do that. It was a problem with your parents [who would ask] “Why do you want to visit, what’s on your mind?” So, dancing became a very important part of our lives, we always looked forward to that. Music was a big part of our lives, because when we were growing up, being the first generation of Americans, we wanted to be Americans and act like Americans even though we didn’t look like Americans. We did everything that the Americans did, the white guys did.” Dances, the primary social activity for all teenagers, were the focus for many Nisei.

Kobayashi confirmed that the popular bands of the time included those of Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey, Lionel Hampton, and Count Basie. Popular singers included Kate Kaiser, Ted Weems, and Sammy Kaye. Radio was the primary purveyor of the latest hit tunes on national programs such as “Major Bowe’s Amateur Hour,” which was one of the most popular programs broadcast in the U.S. in the 1930s and 1940s. “All of us knew the top ten hit parade songs. We knew all the artists. When I was growing up I thought Bing Crosby was the big guy.

Eventually, I changed to Frank Sinatra.” He also heard music live: “In San Francisco the Golden Gate Theater, down at Market and Golden Gate streets, used to have a stage show. I saw a lot of performances; Frank Sinatra used to appear, the Benny Goodman band and others. In the 30s people like Sinatra, the big bands all performed in movie theaters. After the movie a band would play a set or two, a juggler would come out, magicians would do card tricks, and someone would do acrobatics. It was expensive [to go to these shows]. In Chicago they did the same thing, and of course the Paramount Theater in New York was famous for having Frank Sinatra.” It is clear that both listening to music and dancing were central to this Nisei.

In contrast to the many Americanizing influences in his life, Kobayashi’s home life was traditionally Japanese. Kobayashi’s family celebrated *O-shôgatsu* [New Year’s] every year. *O-shôgatsu* lasted a week or longer. “My mother cooked up a ton of food and then friends would come over and drink *sake* and whatever else. Everyone would eat special foods - *o-mochi* (rice cake). We looked forward to it because of the food.” Nisei were expected to attend Japanese school, where they learned to read and write Japanese. They also learned about customs and social obligations as a means to connect them to their heritage. Kobayashi and his two older brothers went, but he rebelled saying, “I am an American, why do I have to go to Japanese school?” He never graduated from Japanese school while his two brothers did. Many Nisei experienced home life rooted in Meiji Japan, but when they left their homes to go to school or be with their friends, their American persona prevailed.

Hisayo Asai

In contrast to urban Nisei, Yoshida and Kobayashi, Hisayo Asai’s personal account tells the experience of Nisei residing in rural areas.¹¹ This interviewee was born in 1920 and raised in Wapato, a very small farming town

in the central part of Washington. Wapato was a mixed community where twenty-five percent of the population was Japanese. Most of the Japanese population were farmers and families who lived outside of town in the outlying areas. Asai's family were not farmers. "My father was a very successful businessman who worked with the farmers packing and shipping [produce]. He had a large warehouse and employed many people, so our life was very comfortable."

Asai's home life was basically American: "We were the only Japanese family in a white community. Our home was just as nice as the others, it was just that we looked different. Our life was very American because we just went along with everything else in the community. We lived just like our neighbors. Both my mother and my father spoke English because they were living in a white community. I think my mother felt a little more comfortable speaking Japanese, but she spoke both Japanese and English." Asai's family conformed to middle class American customs in their attempt to assimilate.

While many aspects of daily life reflected middle class American living, Asai's connection to Japanese culture and the community remained vital. Well-defined segregation in Wapato forced the creation of a separate Japanese community. Her father did quite well as a businessman and he provided financial assistance to many Japanese families. On New Year's, many of the families he helped visited to thank him for his favors. Hisayo's father was an important leader in the Japanese community, and when Japanese Americans were interned during the war, he was sent to a separate Department of Justice camp exclusively for community leaders. While her family ate mostly American food, Asai reminisced how, "Occasionally my mother would make Japanese food, which I loved more than American food. I was always very happy when New Year's came because my mother cooked a feast of *o-Shôgatsu* food. There was a Japanese store in the community and they got all the food shipped over."

Japanese language use, although not actively practiced at home, was a daily activity. Her parents spoke Japanese to each other and Asai went to a Japanese after school program every day until the sixth grade.

Asai gave an account of a social life quite different from Nisei urbanites. The more intense anti-Japanese sentiments in rural farming areas, due to race and the economic competition between Japanese and white farmers, created a very restricted social environment for Nisei youth. Racism severely curbed the social activities of Asai and her age group. When asked about dances and social activities in school Asai answered, "We didn't go. They must have had dances, but we didn't go. We never went to the prom." The Methodist and Buddhist church in Wapato didn't have youth fellowship groups since many people lived far away; there were no organized social activities for Nisei youth. Also, in the rural areas there were no YMCAs or YWCAs, which served as important centers of sports activities and social dances for Nisei who lived in urban centers.

In response to their barren social lives, Nisei youth in Wapato focused on their studies, sports, or the arts. Asai directed her energies toward playing European classical music on the piano, "I was given piano lessons ever since I was six years old. I had two younger sisters and they all had music lessons, but I am the only one that pursued it because I liked it. And so, home life for me was go to school, come home and practice. I did my homework and practiced again. I liked it. We couldn't do a lot of things, so most of the people would just accept it and knew what we could do. I know in many other communities people could take part in sports teams and so most of the communities had their own Japanese sports teams - I think mostly baseball. School was very important. We couldn't go to a lot of things so the children just studied. We all did very well in school." For Asai, pursuing piano performance filled her hours and days; a way to transcend her circumscribed life.

Performing classical music was Hisayo Asai's identification as an American. For young American women, playing piano was both a source of cultivation and parlor home entertainment. In school, she was active as an accompanist for the high school chorus and in Wapato as a soloist for various ladies' club gatherings. Asai commented on how playing piano was her entrée into the mainstream community in her hometown, "I was in demand in the community. They had women's groups who would have meetings and they asked me, "Would you play a solo? They had different clubs, they had garden clubs and different kinds of social clubs. They wanted something to add to their program. I was forever going from one place to another just volunteering. They would ask and I would go. Through my high school years that was very important to me. I enjoyed it. So, I was part of the community and it softened the racism."

As for American popular music, Asai recalled, "I really liked popular music. I wasn't too aware, but I knew which songs were popular at the time. I was so ingrained with classical music that I liked; I practiced so much that I really didn't have time to listen." Asai's involvement with American popular music was minimal; it wasn't until the war and her move to New York City that this music played a greater role for her. She danced at social gatherings hosted by the Japanese American Citizens League where she met and married Woodrow Asai, my father's youngest brother.

Conclusion

Recounting how young Americans of Japanese descent listened to, danced to, and even performed popular music of 1930s and 40s America illustrates the importance of culture as an avenue for Nisei in cultivating their Americanness. George Yoshida contends that a common reaction of Nisei to their predicament was to attempt to assert one's identity as an American

as strongly as possible, often through music. Lowe echoes the Nisei's response: "Where the political terrain can neither resolve nor suppress inequality, it erupts in culture." (1996: 22). It is clear that music contributes to the ethos of a national culture, and as such it can be considered a marker of identity. Popular music's social function among American youth had a dual meaning for Nisei. While music as an accompaniment to dance was an integral part of their social lives, it was also a tacit way for Nisei to reinforce their identity as Americans. Yoshida's statement, "We didn't seek to be Americans, we were Americans. We totally immersed ourselves in American culture" expresses the emphatic way in which some Nisei regarded themselves. Politically, the Nisei's positioning was assimilationist; culturally, they strove toward whiteness—mainstream society's Eurocentric standard of Americanness. Whiteness was the ideal as expressed by Lily Oyama Sasaki in Sacramento in 1930:

We all wanted to be blond and blue-eyed Americans, hated to be Japanese.

We changed our Japanese names into American names. Were criticized for our short hairdos, but didn't care. Went to movies, were crazy about Clara Bow and Joan Crawford! Loved jazz...Red Nichols and the Five Pennies,

Paul Whiteman 'The King of Jazz,' and clarinet-playing Ted Lewis; loved the vocals of Connie Boswell and Ruth Etting. (Yoshida, 1997: 4)

A line of inquiry not directly included in the interviews, but important to the identity of the succeeding Sansei generation, was the influence of African American music in Nisei life through American popular music. From the 1920s on, black and white musician composers borrowed from one another in developing popular music in the United States. In the 1930s and 1940s, black and white big bands played swing, a genre that stylistically combined Tin Pan

Alley and jazz. In this way, African American jazz entered the sphere of American popular music and many Nisei listened and danced to it. In-depth research needs to be conducted on this topic, but a few ideas can be inferred from Nisei statements about music during the 1930s and 1940s. Blackness did not appear to play a direct role in the development of Nisei identity. The interviewees in this study named mostly white singers, bandleaders, and big bands that were all the rage in their youth. Yoshida expressed the most interest in black musicians, mentioning that he listened to bandleaders, Duke Ellington, Lionel Hampton, and Jimmy Lunceford, and singers, Billy Eckstine and Sarah Vaughn. Kobayashi also included Lionel Hampton and Count Basie as popular bandleaders. Yoshida talked about how black music, produced and sold as 'race records' from 1921 to 1942, was marketed to black audiences and were not intended for the rest of the population. He also mentioned that arrangements of the black bands were not available. Contributing to the popularity and reach of white bands and musicians were the amount of exposure they received on popular radio programs—the same programs that exposed Nisei to the latest hits. The continuing disenfranchisement of African Americans also deterred Nisei from considering blackness as an avenue for climbing the social, political, and economic ladder to greater acceptance and mobility. The hegemonic pull of Euro-American mainstream culture appears to have shaped Nisei in idealizing whiteness.

The interviews point to American popular music as having a role in Nisei life, but to varying degrees. A major factor that influenced the degree of importance of popular music was the interviewee's socialization, which was dictated in large part to whether they lived in an urban or rural setting. The two interviewees raised in urban centers, Yoshida and Kobayashi, had very active social lives due to the larger Japanese American communities whose institutions facilitated social activities. Swing band dance music played a much greater role in the social lives

of these urban dwellers. The association of swing music with dancing and socializing gave popular music its power and appeal. Popular music played a much smaller role, however, in the life of the third interviewee, Asai, who grew up in an isolated rural community. Racist attitudes in her town prevented her from having much of a social life, limiting her exposure to and enjoyment of dancing to popular music. Interviewing Asai also revealed that European classical music was important particularly to young Nisei women in emulating middle class Americans. American popular music proved to be one avenue for assimilating into the national culture; future studies need to consider a wider variety of music to better measure the impact music had in Americanizing Nisei. The Nisei interviewees recalled learning Stephen Foster songs and spirituals in school, hymns in church, and campfire songs.

From the interviews we learn that music was only one facet of the Americanization process. Going to the movies, playing games and sports, attending church services, and learning in school were all part of a Nisei's enculturation. Here again, the degree of enculturation varied according to the individual. Nisei lived culturally split lives and some families were more assimilated than others. The differing degrees of enculturation present a complex picture. Choosing music as a reference point for measuring the Nisei's Americanization is only one way from which to view the whole process, but it offers a clear idea of what music meant to them and why.

Tragically, despite Nisei efforts to insert themselves into the national culture, racist conceptions of nationality created insurmountable barriers. The physiological and cultural differences of Asian immigrants and their offspring proved to be too far a field from the Nordic/Anglo-Saxon mold of the late eighteenth century when the foundation for American nationality formed. Then, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries economic and political challenges facing the U.S. as an evolving world power perpetuated nativist sentiments

that shaped immigration policies that were exclusionary, rearticulating racial boundaries of nationality that continued to bar non-whites.

My intent is not only to particularize about the failure of Nisei in their efforts to achieve a national identity through music, but also to present a larger picture that is critical of American nationalism and who is allowed to fully belong. The National Origins system of immigration preferences and quotas, which ended Asian immigration after 1924, was repealed by the passage of the 1965 Immigration & Nationality Act. Echoes of the racist quotas of the National Origins system, however, still reverberate. In the 1965 legislation, countries in the western hemisphere were not subject to any quotas; a quota of 20,000 has subsequently been legislated as a result of heightened security. Meanwhile, countries in the eastern hemisphere have always had a quota of 20,000 (<http://www.asian-nation.org/1965-immigration-act.shtml>). The continuing use of quotas for populations from the eastern hemisphere permanently registers the undesirable status of people who have been racially set apart. Such ideological bias remains a barrier to national citizenship for a variety of people who seek to make the U.S. their new home. Becoming an American is still a challenge that involves countering historically based biases and racial attitudes.

It is the travails of the Nisei that pushed the next generation of Japanese Americans toward an identity politics, calling for a greater acknowledgement of their Japanese heritage as a source of strength, and a pledge to humanity to fight for the rights of people also considered "other." Rejection of the Nisei pointed the way for many third generation Sansei in seeking alternatives and choosing a separatist politics. This new direction led to the creation of the Asian American political movement in the late 1960s into the 1970s. Today, even as citizens, Asian Americans continue to be culturally and racially situated outside the boundaries of the nation. This continuing

legacy of racialization and the enduring anti-immigrant sentiment in the U.S. speaks to the need for a more inclusive society and movement toward a humanism that recognizes merit and worth over skin color and heritage.

Notes

¹ R. Brunt, "The Politics of Identity" in *New Times. The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s*. Ed. S. Hall and M. Jacques (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989); C. Fusco, "Passionate Irreverence: The Cultural Politics of Identity" in *Art Matters. How the Culture Wars Changed America*. Ed. Brian Wallis, Marianne Weems, and Philip Yenawine (New York/London: New York University Press, 1999); P. Gleason, "American Identity and Americanization" in *Concepts of Ethnicity* (A Series of Selections from the Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups), Ed. S. Thernstrom (Cambridge, MA/London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980); S. Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, Ed. J. Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990); R. Jenkins, "Rethinking Ethnicity: Identity, Categorization and Power" in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17, no. 2 (1994); L. Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 1996); D. Palumbo-Liu, *Asian American Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); E. W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, 1978/1994); E. Zaretsky, "Identity Theory, Identity Politics: Psychoanalysis, Marxism, Post-structuralism" in *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, Ed. C. Calhoun (Oxford, UK/Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Press, 1994).

² There is a precedent for orientalist racializations early on in the development of the ideological basis of American identity. Between 1776 and 1815 there was a predisposition toward defining the concept of nationality ethnically along Anglo-Saxon lines. Also during this time, American political ideology formed from "abstract ideals of liberty, equality, and republicanism" drawn from the European Enlightenment. The universalist ideology of American nationality was in theory open to anyone without regard to an individual's "national, linguistic, religious, or ethnic background." This idea formed within the context of the late 18th century when eighty percent of white Americans were British. This majority coupled with a "latent predisposition" to defining the concept of nationality from the perspective of ethnicity resulted in a contradictory view that regarded other racial and cultural groups—blacks or Indians—as "falling outside the range of American nationality" (Gleason 1980: 62-63). Blacks and Indians, therefore, were excluded and only free white people were eligible to become citizens without any regard for their national background or native language. Nativist sentiments became stronger after 1830 when massive migrations from Europe began. American national identity faced a number of challenges in coming to terms with the different religions, politics, education, and culture of the four million immigrants who landed on American shores between 1830 and 1855 (Gleason 1980: 68-69). The American response to this deluge of people who fell outside the Anglo-Saxon mold brought religious and stronger ethnic considerations into the national identity equation. From the 1890s to the 1920s the debate about restricting immigration marked the reversal of the country's original open door policy to immigrants and a growing intolerance of immigrants' perpetuation of their nationalities while living on American soil. World War

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I raised ethnic antagonisms, resulting in immigration restriction laws when the war ended. From the 1900s to the 1920s an Americanization movement stressed the assimilation of immigrants who were expected to conform to mainstream American culture, language, religion, and manners (Gleason 1982: 79, 85).

- ³ For a fuller description of the Protestant, Anglo-Saxon Orientalism, which I refer to as American Orientalism, see John Kuo Wei Tchen's article "Believing is Seeing: Transforming Orientalism and the Occidental Gaze" in *Asia America: Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art*. Tchen discusses how Westerners have been enculturated to view the Asian body and other physical features from the perspective of the "Orientalist socialization" of nineteenth century American commercial culture. Within this context, he introduces the social construction of "yellowface," describing it as a means for Asians to assimilate into mainstream society.
- ⁴ After 1900 scientific racism's promotion of the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon and Nordic races and the assumption that cultural traits were genetically passed on along with physical attributes fed American xenophobia. The science of eugenics furthered such racialized thinking with the view that "the indiscriminate mixing of races was more likely to result in cultural debasement than cultural improvement." Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916) extolled Anglo-Saxonism, systematizing and further influencing racializations that played an important role in restrictive laws of the 1920s (Gleason, 1980: 94). The coupling of "Orientalist racializations" of Asians as inassimilable and attitudes of "Anglo-Saxon" or "Nordic" racial superiority gave rise to Asian immigration exclusion acts and laws against naturalization in 1882, 1917, 1924, and 1934 (Lowe 1996: 5; Kitano and Daniels 1988: 13). The Immigration Act of 1924, in particular, pointedly applied a national-origins quota system that ended Asian immigration for forty-one years. Repeal of these exclusionary laws, between 1943 and 1952, granted Asian immigrants the right to citizenship. However, the almost one-hundred-year period of racist restrictions politically disenfranchised Asians, and only today do they have a significant political presence.
- ⁵ For greater detail about how racial ideologies and economic interests impacted the formation of "modern America," and how Asian immigrants figured into that national body, read the well-researched work *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* by David Palumbo-Liu, which I have cited above in the body of the text.
- ⁶ Carey McWilliams, born in 1905 in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, was a lawyer who championed the causes of minorities in his many articles published in periodicals and newspapers in Los Angeles. In 1939 he was appointed California Commissioner of Immigration and Housing, a position he held until ousted by governor Earl Warren in the early 1940s. He received national attention with two books—*Factories in the Field* and *Ill Fares the Land*—that narrated the problems and difficult life of migrant laborers in nearly three fourths of the U.S. The work by McWilliams cited above—*Japanese-Americans: Symbol of Racial Intolerance*—presents a detailed case history of the mistreatment of this racial minority, and poses a question to American citizens: "What shall we do to solve our fundamental problems at home?" This question is still being asked today.

- ⁷ There is a growing body of research about the Asian American body and the impact it has had and continues to have on how Asian Americans are viewed and received on a visceral level. Elena Creef's book on *Imaging Japanese America: The Visual Construction of Citizenship, Nation, and the Body* is an insightful study of the "distinct visual rhetoric in the symbolic and cultural representation of Japanese Americans in the mid-to late twentieth century, where the racist hysteria of World War II unjustly framed this ethnic community as disloyal citizens of the nation." Creef analyzes a broad range of visual and "textual" material making it very useful for delving into the visceral aspects of difference.
- ⁸ George Yoshida, interview with author, San Francisco, California, 30 March 2006.
- ⁹ The Nisei's emulation of white bands is an important point, but it was not a part of my initial inquiry. I intend to include this line of questioning in future interviews with Nisei. The idea of white vs. black music influence on Nisei is discussed briefly in the conclusion.
- ¹⁰ Yutaka Kobayashi, interview with author, Wellesley, Massachusetts, 13 June 2006.
- ¹¹ Hisayo Asai, interview with author, New York, New York, 31 August 2006.

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**“If You’re Black, Get Back!”
The Color Complex:
Issues of Skin-Tone Bias
in the Workplace**

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Skin-tone has always played a role in the socioeconomic lives of African-Americans, and while there are always successes, there are also those who are not as fortunate. A major success for African Americans has come in the shape of the election of the nation’s first African-American President, Barack Obama, and, by extension, the first African-American First Lady, Michelle Obama. Among the cries of happiness and hope after the election, there lingers a feeling among many Americans whether Barack Obama would have been elected if he were darker rather than lighter skinned. Though the question is rhetorical at this point the question is nevertheless one asked in many American households. Even after the election and inauguration of the first Black President and the subsequent entrance of the first Black Family into the White House, many critics wonder whether the United

States is still a nation absorbed in skin-tone prejudices or has, in the words of the late Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., truly “overcome” them. With such a question in mind, the position of the First Lady becomes a precarious one. While she is not principally responsible for guiding the fate of the nation, her role is a visible one, which makes her presence in the public eye an important one nonetheless. Historically, the First Lady is expected to embody ideals of womanhood such as virtue, beauty, grace, and honor to the nation at large. Up until this point, these ideals have been expressed to young women in this nation as coterminous with the concept of “whiteness.” More pointedly, will images of beauty shift away from narrow Eurocentric standards because a Black First Family resides in the White House?

One of the factors correlated with perceptions of skin-tone and socioeconomic status is the concept of beauty. Beauty, therefore, is more than a physical representation of aesthetic appeal; it holds a viable position in all aspects of American social life. According to author Margaret L. Hunter, beauty operates as a tool of “social capital” for women (177). As such, if the beauty ideal in this nation has been one centered on Eurocentric appeal, how has it affected the lives of the other racial and ethnic populations within American society? Specifically, how have these attitudes developed into a system of colorism, or skin-tone biases, and how have these attitudes affected the socioeconomic lives of African-American women, specifically and mainly, in the workplace? The most recent data collected concerning the issue of skin-tone bias with socioeconomic status was collected in the mid-1990s, over a decade ago. Since then, there has been a gap in current data collection. Therefore, I intend to determine if there have been any significant changes in the impact of colorism on African-American women in the workplace through the process of interviews, qualitative as well as quantitative research, since the last data collection.

The key concepts that this paper will focus on are as follows: racism, colorism, amalgamation, phenotypic characteristics, hypo-descent, white supremacy, and socioeconomic status. Each is broadly defined as follows: racism in the context of this paper refers to the systematic privilege given to persons of European descent over the rest of the American population; colorism will refer to the systematic privileging of lighter skinned members within a community of color over those of darker complexion; amalgamation will be understood as the process of racial mixing through sexual intercourse; and lastly, phenotypic characteristics will apply to those physical features used as tools for social and political separation, i.e. hair texture, nose shape, lip thickness, etc. Moreover, hypo-descent will refer to the legal means of designating mixed race individuals in the category of “lower race,” or race of color; white supremacy will refer to the ideology that keeps all of the tools for social separation firmly rooted in American society. For example, more than the actions of members of racist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan. For the purpose of this paper, the term white supremacy will refer to the ideology that keeps the tools for social preparation firmly rooted in American society through a hierarchal ordering of different racial categories, whereby persons of European descent are at the top. Lastly, socioeconomic status refers to three dominant categories: education, income, and marriage.

Literature Review

Colorism and Gender

Colorism, as stated earlier, is the American system that privileges the lighter-skinned over the darker-skinned members within a community of color (Gullickson, 2005; Hunter, 2002; Hill, 2002; Ross, 1997; Keith & Thompson, 2001). Several studies have concluded that skin tone, in most instances, is a more salient factor for women than for men. Furthermore, the authors concluded that

women with lighter skin tone tend to receive more privilege in the form of socioeconomic gains than dark-skinned women with the similar social characteristics (Hunter, 1998; Hunter, 2002; Hunter, 2005). Hill (2002) found that skin tone is a more salient characteristic for women than for men in terms of perceived attractiveness (77). Although it may not seem like a viable factor within the workplace, perceptions of attractiveness does play a quantifiable role in the socioeconomic status of African-American women. Hunter (2002) maintains that attractiveness or beauty can operate as “social capital” for Black women (77). Within a study conducted by Hunter in 2002, it was determined that light-skinned women could use their lightness to increase their socioeconomic status in three dimensions: education, income, and marriage. The findings of the Hunter study found that on average African American women of a lighter-skin tone tend to earn more money, go farther in higher education, and marry men of a higher economic status as compared to darker-skinned counterparts.

In addition, Sekayi (2003) conducted a study indicating that some Black women chose to consciously conform to Eurocentric ideals of beauty as opposed to African standards. This desire for assimilation reinforces the role white supremacist attitudes such as colorism play in contemporary society. Within a community of color, dark-skinned women often witness the privilege granted to their lighter skinned counter parts, just as light skinned women witness the privileges granted to White women. In response to these intraracial as well as interracial privileges, Black women, consciously and unconsciously, move towards ideals of beauty connected to perceptions of whiteness (Sekayi, 2003). It is necessary to understand these three basic levels of socioeconomic status—education, income, and marriage—as interrelated. Furthermore, within these three levels, color impacts the attainment level negatively or positively as based on perceived skin tone variations.

For example, Ross conducted a study proposing two major hypotheses: men and women will have different criteria for dating; men will generally illustrate a stronger preference for physical appeal in the form of lighter skin tone than women will (559). Skin tone is a factor when it comes to spousal selection. Based on recent data spousal selection further supports the notion that skin-tone is a more salient factor for women than for men, since the men who responded based their spousal selection preferences on skin tone more than women. Additionally, researchers argue that Black women are more able to use light skin to their socioeconomic advantage than Black men (Hill, 2002; Hunter, 1998; Hunter, 2002; Hunter, 2005; Keith & Thompson, 2001; Ross, 1997; Sekayi 2003). Whether used as a form of “social capital,” (Hunter, 2002) or as a tool for gauging self esteem (Keith & Thompson, 2001), skin tone is a more salient factor of socioeconomic status for Black women than for Black men.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative research will consist of personal narratives, interviews, and literary works of fiction. All of these methods of data collection will offer a personal account of how color affects the socioeconomic status of Black women in order to expose how skin tone bias impacts women in the workplace. Studies break down socioeconomic status into three principle dimensions—education, income, and marriage (Gullickson, 2005; Henshel, 1971; Hunter, 1998; Hunter, 2002; Hunter, 2005). These dimensions are interrelated since education can be used as a determinant for future income, and income can broaden or narrow a woman’s option for marriage. Interviews and personal narratives will be used, furthermore, to show an interrelation between these dimensions. Literary works of fiction will focus primarily on the concept of “beauty,” a tool used to achieve socioeconomic gains. For instance, several studies have shown that light skinned women are more likely to marry men of a higher social status than

dark skinned women with similar credentials (Hunter, 1998; Hunter, 2002; Hunter, 2005).

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* illustrates exactly how perceptions of beauty operate as social capital. Morrison's novel is set in 1941 Lorain, Ohio, just at the end of the Depression in the 1930s. The central characters of this novel are the members of the Breedlove family, principally, youngest daughter, Pecola. Like many of the Black families depicted in this novel, the Breedloves are of low income status. However, a factor that sets them apart from the other poor families in the novel, according to the narrator, is their perceived "ugliness," in terms of their physical appearance, as well as their attitudes towards life and the world in which they lived. Within the context of Morrison's novel, Pecola describes her idea of beauty as having white skin and, especially, blue eyes—ideally like Shirley Temple. Throughout the novel Pecola struggles fantastically and impossibly to gain this physical trait which she believes will forever alter her circumstance and fate. As Pecola imagines, if she is "beautiful," her family situation will not be as dire for her as it is. Morrison's work illuminates how deeply color stratification permeates American society. Pecola struggles with a concept of beauty reflected by the white child actress Shirley Temple, which, as a young black girl, is her exact aesthetic opposite. When the epitome of beauty does not resemble you at all, as Morrison's novel expresses, it is difficult to cope and find understanding and self-acceptance.

Another fictional representation of race is Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which was set mostly in the all black town of Eatonville, Florida. In this novel, the character Janie proclaims: "Ah jus couldn't see mahself married to no black man. It's too many black folks already. We ought to lighten up the race" (3). This is another example of how colorism operates within the Black community. These fictional illustrations are not limited to imaginative works of

literature though; in some cases, they represent the feelings of many African Americans during the era in which the authors were writing as well as those held by African Americans today. In the memoir *Don't Play in the Sun: One Woman's Journey through the Color Complex*, Marita Golden describes a scene from her life that echoes the words of Hurston's character:

One summer afternoon when I am playing outside, racing the boys on our street to see who can reach the end of the block first (I do), my mother comes onto the porch and as I speed past shouts out to me, "Come on in the house—its too hot to be playing out here. I've told you don't play in the sun. You're going to have to get a light skinned husband for the sake of your children as it is (4).

Moreover, white supremacist attitudes and systematic racism help explain the manifold social inequalities in most Western societies (Christian, 2002). All levels of social interaction are therefore interwoven, since ideology, as it permeates one level of society like the personal, will often seep through to other levels as well, as it does the professional. The relationship people of color have with racial attitudes and perceptions is reflected in all aspects of society, making the separation between the personal and the professional difficult to discern. In an interview conducted by Margaret L. Hunter, a dark skinned woman explains how skin tone affected her relationship with a light skinned friend:

Color has always come up in my life. Always. It's bad to be dark. It's good to be light when I was growing up. I will say that I started to resent lighter skinned women. I have a friend of mine [who is light skinned]. When I lived next door to her, I hated her. She's beautiful. And I thought: "God, I hate you." I never talked to her because she was beautiful. But, [skin]

color has always come up. It's like how in slavery times the lighter person would be up in the house. That's still going on because lighter is closer to white, and since it's closer to white, its better (73).

This is an example of how skin tone bias affects people in their personal relationships, which they then can carry over into their workplace relationships.

Quantitative Research

The general hypothesis of the quantitative data to be reviewed is how skin tone affects Black women in the workplace negatively within increasing gradients of skin color (Gullickson 2005; Hunter, 1998; Hunter, 2002; Hunter, 2005; Ross, 1997). Furthermore, aesthetic appeal for Black women will diminish as darkness increases (Keith & Thompson, 2001; Ross, 1997; Sekayi, 2003). Longitudinal data gleaned from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (1975, 1976) offered information on how sex and gender affect the amount of authority people hold in the workplace. Authority is a concept directly related to professional environments and will be defined as the “probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of person...” (Smith, 2002, 510). The cross sectional data that was obtained showed that “race (and sex) differences in earning are partly due to differential access to span control and span of responsibility; and class and/or authority will have a substantial effect on the earnings net of human capital and labor market characteristics” (Smith, 2002, 528).

Although the research findings above do not account for color stratification per se, they do illustrate how the amount of authority, as well as income, an individual can acquire will decrease or increase according to race and gender differentials. Studies that account for changes across color gradients (Hunter, 1998; Hunter, 2002; Hunter, 2005) explore the relationship between skin tone and authority. In Hunter's (2005) study of the

socioeconomic status of Black women, a color gradient of 1-5 (darkest to lightest) was used. From that data it was deduced that with each increasing increment of lightness income increased by \$673 annually (43). Two similar studies by Hunter conducted in 1998 and 2002 gleaned similar results.

In terms of attractiveness and self-concept, the results gathered maintained that perceived “lightness” offered a privileged status to people within a community of color. A 33-question survey conducted by Sekayi (2003) concluded that 46% of respondent’s desired smaller bodies, 32% were ambivalent or displeased with the texture of their hair, and 26% disliked their overall appearance (475). These findings are significant for two reasons: 1) they reinforce the dominance of white supremacist ideals, and 2) they enforce the idea that Black women are aware that a Eurocentric aesthetic ideal is more favorable to socioeconomic status. In terms of mate selection, which relates to the socioeconomic component of marriage, light skin is effectively used as social capital. Ross (1997) concluded that 33% of the men preferred to date women with lighter skin as compared to 16.4% of women who preferred men with light skin (565). Moreover, 38.3% of men expressed a desire to marry a woman with a lighter complexion (565). These results reinforce the principle that skin tone, in terms of perceptions of attractiveness, is a more salient factor for women than for men (Keith & Thompson, 2001; Ross, 1997). As a whole, the quantitative data provided statistical evidence of the impact skin tone plays in the socioeconomic lives of Black women. Furthermore, it offered concrete evidence of the role race and gender play in the workplace beyond the categories of income and hiring rates by showing how it affects levels of authority.

Methodology

For my study of the impact of skin tone on the socioeconomic status of African-American women today, I intend to interview four African-American women

within the fields of law and academia. I choose these two particular fields because of the low representation of African-American women within their ranks and my own personal interest. Moreover, the most recent data collected on the subject of skin-tone in regards to African American women are primarily surveys that were conducted in the late 1990s. My data will be obtained from two professors at a middle-sized University in the United States, two lawyers, practicing in a metropolitan area. Fortunately, I was acquainted with all of my participants before I began my research, so locating participants was an easy job. I intend to send out a recruitment letter as well as a letter of consent to the participants I am interested in interviewing. I intend to send out six letters in order to reach my ideal sample size of four participants. The women that I have in mind are all from diverse backgrounds and are also of varying shades of skin-tone.

Although no monetary incentives were offered for the interview process, I do intend to give each participant a thank you card upon completion of each interview. Since my project involves human subjects, I had to obtain permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which was summarily granted. My project deals with adult women from a non-vulnerable population so permission was not difficult for me to obtain. Within the next few months, I intend to obtain data from two separate locations. One of these locations will be in a metropolitan area within the United States; the other, a small college town. Along with a recruitment letter and a letter of consent, I introduced my participants to my project and offered details of my procedures. There will be two interviews approximately an hour each in which a series of questions will be asked and tape recorded. My research advisor and I will be the only ones with access to these interviews once they have been recorded. Afterwards, I will transcribe the information given, and provide each participant with a pseudonym in order to

insure and maintain confidentiality.

Once I have collected and transcribed the data, I intend to search for trends and patterns in order to determine if there have been significant changes since data was collected in the 1990s. The data collected via surveys in the 1990s showed a significant difference between the socioeconomic attainment of African-Americans with darker and lighter skin, as it showed that those with a lighter complexion achieved higher attainment. I have created approximately 20 questions for my interview sessions; however, my participants will be encouraged to go off on their own and elaborate on a particular theme they wish to identify, although I will work to maintain a proper course. A few of the questions I intend to ask are as follows:

- How do you feel about the color of your skin?
- When did you decided to become a professor/lawyer/magistrate?
- Who influenced you?
- Have you ever tried to lighten/darken your skin?
- Do you feel that your income is impacted by your skin-tone?

These are just a few examples of the course that I want my interviews to take. It is my purpose to uncover trends and patterns in order to identify if there have been significant changes since the 1990s. Throughout the course of these interviews, I intend to uncover points in which these women began to view skin-tone as a hindrance to their socioeconomic status. I will look to see how skin tone impacted decisions they made in terms of their careers and personal lives. More specifically, I plan to obtain information on whether or not skin tone impacted their decisions to choose their current profession, and how it plays a role in the fields they now occupy.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Irene Vilar, *Impossible Motherhood: Testimony of an Abortion Addict*. (New York: Other Press, 2009). 222 pp., \$15.00 paper.

From its flesh-toned cover etched with red tallies marking the author's fifteen aborted pregnancies, to its unflinching accounts of each procedure, Irene Vilar's *Impossible Motherhood: Testimony of an Abortion Addict* forces readers to confront the issue of abortion. Though the topic is inevitably divisive, Vilar's purpose, as stated from the prologue of her memoir, is clearly neither didactic nor partisan.

Still, Vilar's story is politically charged. Implicit in the personal narrative of failing to fulfill the role of mother to her fifteen aborted pregnancies is a political narrative in which Vilar challenges the reductive binaries of Western discourse, which are imposed upon the abortion debate and her own story of addiction. "Everything," Vilar writes, "can be explained, justified, our last century tells us. Everything except for the burden of life interrupted that shall die with me" (5).

While this challenge to Western thought is by no means a new contribution to the field of ethnic studies,

Vilar does politicize her narrative in more relevant and relatively unexplored territories, primarily by exhuming the history of the United States' testing of birth control technology and population control policies in her home country of Puerto Rico from 1955 to 1969. In narrating her personal struggle to reconcile this history and, in its wake, synthesize and express her identity as a Puerto Rican *American* woman, Vilar gives voice not only to Latinas, but to immigrant women suspended between, and shaped by, distinct histories, cultures, political ideologies, and experiences of oppression.

Most interesting is Vilar's tracing of her progress as a writer and how this development in language and the academic literary arena is inextricably tied to her process of creating and articulating her identity. The first half of the memoir features consistent references to canonical Western writers—Pascal, Jung, Goethe, Camus, DeMan—whom Vilar studied when she immigrated to the U.S. to attend a university. By anchoring her narrative in the language of writers far removed from her country, history, and experiences, Vilar illustrates her initial subordination to the dominant discourse and its suppression of her ability to assert her identity in a field governed by white males.

Although her struggle to establish her identity through language is common to many immigrant narratives, Vilar further layers her narrative by addressing how being a woman complicates the pursuit of self-expression. Thirty-five years her senior, the husband (and former professor) with whom Vilar had the majority of her fifteen abortions is referred to as “The Master,” or the anonymous yet monolithic “he,” and emerges as an embodiment of the patriarchal discourse that dictates her self-censorship. She admits that because she “was writing for him” (101), her previous memoirs omitted mention of their abusive relationship and fifteen abortions, thereby revealing the link between the fragmentation of her prior narratives and her splintered identity.

Rather self-reflexively, Vilar acknowledges that necessary to writing *Impossible Motherhood*, she began to claim control over her writing: “For seven years he had taught me plenty of words but somewhere along the way I had learned to distrust most of what came out of my mouth” (126). Not long after this epiphany, Vilar avers her refusal of Simone De Beauvoir’s statement that “[y]our past is the situation you are no longer in.” With this first rejection of Western discourse, Vilar details her long-awaited return to Puerto Rico and, in her descriptions of her homeland, Vilar’s language indicates a tethering of past, present, body, and identity.

It is at this point, too, that the purpose of the memoir’s structure crystallizes. Its sections, untitled and chapterless, allow Vilar to fluidly blend the historical, the literary, and the personal. Though the juxtaposition of certain events feels forced at times—particularly her effort to stress the influence of her political activist grandmother, Lolita Lebrón, who is absent through most of her life and the book—Vilar both echoes and builds upon the works of writers such as Barbara Mellix, ultimately constructing a compelling narrative testifying that writing, especially for ethnic (and gendered) minorities, is a perpetual process of becoming. To that end, Vilar concludes her memoir with a series of hopeful diary entries addressed to her daughter who is still in the womb—the first pregnancy that Vilar did not abort. Here, in embracing a source of life in a story overburdened with loss, Vilar welcomes becoming a mother and her full self—past, present, future: “You are the bond between me and the world I come from,” Vilar writes to her daughter. “You are becoming my origins” (222).

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Fire and Ink: An Anthology of Social Action Writing. Eds. Frances Payne Adler, Debra Busman, and Diana García. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009). xxi, 460 pp., \$32.95 cloth.

By keeping their opening remarks very brief (the preface plus the micro-introduction add up to less than seven pages), the editors have made an unassuming choice: to let the work by the contributors do the talking. In other projects, this plunge into creative material without providing much of a historical or literary context might come across as daring, and with an anthology of social action writing, that risk may or may not pay off. The expectation of *Fire and Ink*, it appears, is that the reader (or instructor) will have some basic knowledge of activist writers and the range of social issues they are responding to with poetry, essays, rally speeches, op-eds or performance pieces. That presumption signals that this anthology is not for everybody: it has been shaped with a specific audience in mind. Why else would the opening piece be titled “You Gotta Be Ready for Some Serious Truth to Be Spoken,” authored by one of the editors.

In that piece, Debra Busman asserts a “no apologies” stance—“you gotta be ready to learn at least fifteen times more than what whatever it is you think you have to teach” (6)—that mirrors the spectrum of individual voices

and tones in *Fire and Ink* that come together as a single community to offer an alternative literary history of the twentieth century. Indeed, only a handful of the ninety contributors are taught in the traditional canons, the rest are “literary outsiders.” But this marginalized status is not held up as a critique of American literature, but rather as a badge of honor since the lesser-known writers keep comfortable company with some very impressive and respected names (must-haves in the multicultural academic curricula) such as Gloria Anzaldúa, June Jordan, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Li-Young Lee, Martín Espada, Linda Hogan, Jimmy Santiago Baca and Alice Walker, who proudly declares: “We are the ones we have been waiting for” (284).

With few notable exceptions (like the international figures Arundhati Roy and Mahmoud Darwish) and sometimes puzzling inclusions (a poem by Ethel Rosenberg, for example), *Fire and Ink* tends to limit its territory to the U.S. political landscape within the last fifty years, which is troubling and complex enough to inspire this rich body of letters. Adler, Busman and García work hard to capture a very contemporary climate (which includes the wars with the Middle East, the conflict at Vieques, the struggles of the GLBT population, and immigrant issues). This allows the anthology to thrive as a pedagogical tool with social-historical references within reach of the students in today’s classrooms.

Structurally, *Fire and Ink* is divided into ten convenient sections that tap into everything from homophobia to xenophobia, from class injustices to environmental issues, each a charged topic that will lend itself to stimulating exchanges between different points of view in an educational setting since this project has been clearly designed to provoke, prompt, excite and motivate. And for those instructors who may shy away from the “hot buttons” of political conversation, the editors conclude the anthology with a section titled “Talking, Teaching and Imagining: Social Action Writing,” which provides helpful

testimonies and interviews about the nature and process of approaching discussion on such subjects as race.

At the very least, this anthology succeeds in gathering the standards of activist writings, which have never been collected conveniently into a single volume. But the greater value of *Fire and Ink* is in its earnest belief in social action literature as an agent for education, enlightenment and, ultimately, change. Adler, Busman and García claim important roles as fierce advocates of activist writers who continue to resist, protest and take responsibility for their ideas without fear. *Fire and Ink* refuses to pander to the dominant conservative thought or to political correctness; it is a precious gift to the radical and free thinkers who, in the words of Arundhati Roy, “have a space now that a lot of others who think like me don’t” (422).

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Shalini Shankar. *Desi Land: Teen Culture, Class and Success in Silicon Valley*, Duke University Press, 2008. 264 pp., \$22.95 paper.

Shalini Shankar begins her book by locating her own positionality of growing up in a predominantly white, middle-class high school in suburban New York versus the study's main focus of South Asian youth in Silicon Valley's mostly ethnic neighborhoods. Shankar was encouraged by her Indian, immigrant family to socialize with other South Asians, similar to the youth she studies; however, she clearly notes the stark differences in the researcher and subject divisions. Shankar employs an unusual anthropological approach to study Desi youth in the Silicon Valley by historically contextualizing the economic success of the South Asian community while presenting the sometimes destructive behavior of the youth. These behaviors include drug use, gossip, inter-youth and inter-generational tensions. This study was completed during the 1999-2001, at the height of the "dot.com" boom. Shankar seems to develop a genuine bond with the youth and organizes the data and research in a methodological, organized, and analytical way. The scholarly contribution she makes to South Asian American Studies and Women's Studies is concrete and evidenced by

various points that follow. She also provides a significant insight into inter-generation bonding, although her discussion of slang language within the Desi youth culture remains somewhat reductive.

Shankar's analysis of a historic time period in the Silicon Valley is relevant and groundbreaking for the Desi community in the tradition of Sunaina Maira's *Desis in the House* and Vijay Prashad's *Karma of Brown Folks*. Similar to Maira's groundbreaking scholarship about Desi youth and club culture, Shankar successfully addresses societal pressures, the technology industry, class division, gender, familial roles, linguistic codes, and inter-community tensions. More specifically, her analysis emphasizes four main areas: 1) linguistic styles as subversive; 2) self-segregation in high schools; 3) notions of familial shame and gossip as tools of control; and 4) the "grey sector" as upward mobility. In the Indian community, these may seem areas of common knowledge; however, in the world of academia, Shankar is unique in analyzing the positionality of South Asian American youth culture in the Silicon Valley by interrogating the racialization of South Asian Americans as well as the gender and class boundaries they challenge in the American public schools. She successfully contextualizes the model minority experience of Asian Americans by explaining how East Asian and South Asian groups were chosen to participate in "Multicultural Day" over what was viewed by administrators as the more militant groups such as Black Student Union and Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA). This hierarchal racialization by administrators in the public school system is one example of how South Asian Americans are viewed by the mainstream in Silicon Valley as the model minority. At the same time, Shankar debunks this myth by interviewing South Asian American drug users and youth that regularly lie to their parents in order to pursue sexual and social relationships. Although Shankar's research is on the forefront in this area, there are themes that could use

clarification and further interrogation.

Shankar describes the process by which South Asian families consume Bollywood films and then analyzes this consumption as a form of bonding within the immigrant families. However, the so-called bonding that takes place with her subjects needs to be scrutinized and analyzed at a more specific level. While the bonding and nostalgia that takes place over Bollywood may be occurring, the types of connections that take place between the families need to be further investigated. For example, are heteronormative, patriarchal structures and agendas being encouraged for South Asian youth through the viewing of Bollywood cinema? Shankar leaves us with a superficial understanding of what types of bonding occur in the lives of South Asian American families. In addition, her use of slang language becomes repetitive and does not investigate the relationship between the South Asian American, African American and Latino communities. One Latino administrator she interviews mentions that he commonly mistook the South Asian youth for Latinos until they spoke, but inter-ethnic relationships and the importance of hip hop as empowerment are never discussed in Shankar's study. This potential for understanding the inter-racial relationships could be expanded upon to include tensions and collaborations.

Shakar's book is an important contribution to the understanding of race, class, gender, immigration, ethnicity and socio-economic status of the South Asian immigrant community. The multiple analyses that Shankar undertakes expand the current youth scholarship and challenge existing notions of the model minority myth as it is applied to South Asians in the United States. Furthermore, her scholarship offers an important dimension to the fields of Asian American Studies, Women's Studies, and Anthropology.

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D I A S P O R A

A JOURNAL OF TRANSNATIONAL STUDIES

Diaspora is dedicated to the multidisciplinary study of the history, culture, social structure, politics and economics of both the traditional dispersions that in the past three decades have chosen to identify themselves as "diasporas." These encompass groups ranging from the African-American to the Ukrainian-Canadian, from the Caribbean British to the new East and South Asian diasporas. The discourses of nationalism, transnationalism, ethnicity, postcolonialism and globalization constitute the semantic domain covered by the journal.

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ETHNIC STUDIES REVIEW

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